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MARK GUY PEARSE

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# SHORT TALKS FOR THE TIMES.

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MARK GUY PEARSE,

AUTHOR OF "DANIEL QUORM," "MISTER HORN," ETC., ETC.

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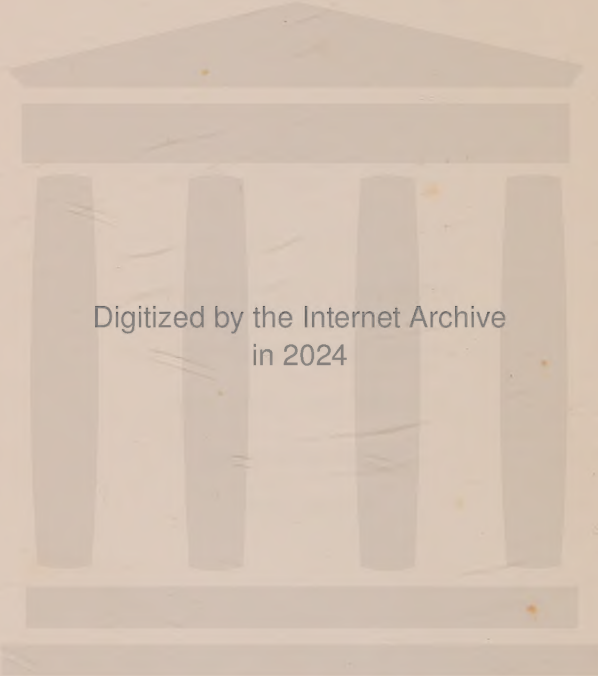
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TO  
MY FRIEND  
THOMAS CHAMPNESS,  
IN ADMIRATION ALIKE OF THE MAN  
AND HIS WORK, THIS BOOK  
IS AFFECTIONATELY  
DEDICATED.





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## I.

### *THE LOVE OF GOD: THE GOD OF LOVE.*

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”—  
1 JOHN iv. 8.

#### PART I.

IS God knowable?—this is the question which our age of scientific inquiry is asking. Can we know Him, and if so, how? To some, it is a wonder indeed that the question can ever be asked. To others it is perhaps a wonder that it can be answered. The answer is no—and yes. No, He is not knowable to the intellect, with its prying and searching;—provable, perhaps, but not knowable. Yes, He is knowable indeed, assuredly and beyond all shadow of a doubt, *to the heart*. Here is the answer that abides for all time—that love is the only way of knowing God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is Love. The faculty by which we know Him is not of the intellect, but of the heart. These things are hidden from the wise and prudent, and are revealed only to the love and trust of the childlike spirit.



This is the truth which underlies the text, and out of which it grows,—*that only love knows love*. It is a poor kind of love that depends for its proof upon the skill of the logician. The love is lost by default that must hire counsel to take up its case and eloquently contend for its existence. Love must tell its own story, and carry its own proof. The intellect cannot receive it, nor can argument convey it: the heart only can know it, and rest in it, and rejoice in this sweet secret of love.

There is an Old Testament incident in which this truth is vividly set forth, and which I would set as frontispiece to our thoughts on this text. Moses had prayed—*I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory*. God graciously answers our prayers according to His better knowledge of us; and there came the answer—"I will make My goodness pass before Thee . . . for no man shall see My glory and live." And early in the morning, when none else was stirring, Moses left the tent and passed away up the mountain side. And there, as the rising sun touched the mountain top with ruddy gold, and whilst all the valleys lay in mist, God passed by and proclaimed Himself—*The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, that will by no means clear the guilty*. Thus he who could not look upon the glory of God, could behold His goodness.

Put the two passages together; for in each there

lies the same root truth—that which alone we can know of God is His love. That in us which alone can know Him is our love. Thus, then, love is the capacity for knowing God. This loftiest knowledge dwells not with intellectual strength, no matter what vast stores of learning a man may have gathered, what grasp of thought he may possess, what force of perception, what splendour of imagination may be his—*he that loveth not knoweth not God.*

See how the Lord Jesus Christ recognises this truth, and bases all prayer upon it. “When ye pray, say, Our Father who art in Heaven.” “If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” Words which have become so familiar that we cease to wonder at them; but no conception of God so lofty or sublime ever fell from other lips. *Our Father which art in Heaven.* The relationship which more than any other is the manifestation of the tenderest pity and most constant care, which is the strongest possible claim upon help and love—this is to be transferred to God. It is impossible to speak too strongly about the horrible mischief that they do who make children think of God as a terror, spying them day and night that He may treasure up against them all that is wrong, and punish them. That black fear will do the devil’s work more effectually than he can do it for himself; driving the children into a hatred of God which is worse than

atheism. *Our Father*—what does it mean but that He is bending over us to pity us and to help us ; to teach us and to make us good ; grieved infinitely when we do wrong ; glad indeed when we do well ? This is the first step and beginning of the knowledge of God. He that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is Love. We cannot teach children to know God by the Catechism—God is omnipotent, omniscient, and ubiquitous—this does not make Him near or dear to any heart. But kneeling in lowly dependence, and saying, *Our Father which art in Heaven*, my desire and expectation go forth to One Who meets me, and responds to me, and makes Himself known to me, as surely as the mother responds to the cry of her child ; and the heart learns to rest in Him as surely as the child rests in the consciousness of the mother's love.

Let us try to think how otherwise we can know God. Tell me of Him as the Omniscient—the *All-wise*. How can I know what that means ? I *know* only by what I am conscious of in myself, or by what I see about me. But within me or about me what is there that can teach me of the All-wise ? We collect our information slowly, and compare the guesses of the ages, and watch the ways of Nature, and after long years of patient toil some man discerns the secret ; and that comes to be the starting-point of further searching. Such is our wisdom—a toilful watching and a doubtful guess ; so that the wisest is he who feels that he knows the least.



What then have I within me or about me by which to conceive of the All-wise;—to Whom there is no buried past, no hidden future,—all the ages lying open and naked in His sight; to Whom distance is not and darkness is not, and from Whom the universe hides no secret thing? I am only bewildered as I hear of such an One;—I know Him not.

I hear of the *Almighty*, but what does it mean? I judge of strength by my own arm, or by the winds and angry seas; or by the power of human mechanism. In all these I can see only matter overcoming matter. But how can I conceive of the Almighty, upholding not only the round world and all that therein is, but the million worlds that roll around us,—Whose might is but the utterance of His will;—He speaks and it is done; He commands and the mountains stand fast—I have nothing by which to know the Omnipotent. I cannot by searching find Him out.

I hear of the *Self-existent*, the *Independent*. What is that? I see all things depending alike for their source and their sustenance upon others. A thousand hands reach out to us the supply of our need. For life and health, for food and clothing, I am dependent upon the great sun in the heavens, the air, the rain, the earth. What heads must plan and what hands must toil that I may live. What then can I know of Him Whose name is *I Am*? From everlasting to everlasting He is God, without beginning, without end.

And if I turn from these aspects to the moral character of God, I am yet more bewildered. Tell me of the Righteousness of God—that He sees all things—the secret motive, the hidden wish, the passing thought, the trivial word; that with Him there is no past; that nothing is hidden, nothing mistaken; that all the influence of the life as it stretches away on every side is known to Him; and that all is tried by the perfect standard of His righteousness! Indeed of righteousness itself my conception is dimmed and full of error—much as a blind man might try to think of a landscape by the description of one who sees it. I can only “guess and fear.” Sin has put out the eyes by which I can see true righteousness; and perhaps as much in mercy as in punishment, for if once I could see in the fierce white light of God the meaning of my sin and the result of it, I could find no other hell. Everything within me would cry in terror, “Hide me from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne!”

But think again. *If I did know all this about God, I should not know HIM.* I can know something of the knowledge of a man and yet not know him. I can judge of the strength of a man, and yet not know any more about him. Vastness, immensity, knowledge, power, leave me as utterly as ever a stranger to God. I do not know *Him*—how to think of Him; what to expect from Him; how to approach *Him*. But tell me that He is Love—that what love is, that is God—then I know Him. I know now

how He feels and thinks and acts. I know now how to come to Him, and to speak to Him. Now do I know *Himself* when I know that He is love.

*He that loveth knoweth God*—look at this faculty within us by which we know God. *Love is ours as nothing else is ours.* The slow and irksome toil of learning is not needful for love. Earth is ever growing in the knowledge of forces about us; and as the nations grow in fitness for possession more and more the earth becomes man's heritage. But love has learnt no deeper feeling, no truer devotion, no sweeter utterance, than when it knit the heart of our father Adam to our fair mother Eve; or than when it sang its earliest cradle song about the world's first-born. / Love alone of human faculties wants no teaching. The dullest scholar may be a very master of this art, and the most unlettered may read aright the signs and mysteries of love. Love is in our midst a God-like thing—the lingering image of the great Creator. Like God Himself, love has no equal; love has no rival. No force can compel it; no haughtiest command can secure it. Love laughs at fetters; love heeds no walls; no prison doors can hold it; it mocks at threats as powerless, and holds its foes in derision. Love like God is always present; it knows no bound of time or space. It triumphs over death itself, and out-passing earth it claims the infinite as its home, and only immortality and eternity can satisfy it. He that loveth knoweth God, for God is love.

*This and this alone can satisfy us—to know the Love of God.* All thought of God short of this can but awe and terrify us. Let me know Him as the Righteous only, and what then? He is the great Judge, whose majesty adds to the sin of my rebellion against Him. Let me know Him as the All-wise, and that dread Presence is for ever tracking me day and night, keeping with unerring exactness the record of every thought and wish and purpose. Let me know Him as Almighty—what is that but His Power to enforce the penalty of my sin? Let me know Him as the Everlasting—and for ever stretches that awful Presence through all the ages, making escape impossible. But *God is love.* Ah, then I come to Him; then I rest in Him. And what then? His righteousness becomes the very security and faithfulness of His mercy; the foundation and strength and glory of His Love. His wisdom, what is it but the eyes of His tender care and pity with which He ever watcheth me? His power, what is it but the everlasting arms that do encompass me? And His eternity is that which completes my blessedness. Show us *the Father*, and it sufficeth us. This is the knowledge and this the vision which alone can satisfy us. *God is Love.*

*God is Love.* Believe in it. Rejoice in it. This is the source and beginning of all that is good. The gift of Jesus Christ and all the story of His unspeakable grace; the thousand promises that shine from



God's word like the stars of heaven ; the blessed gifts of the Holy Ghost within us—repentance, faith, obedience, are the *result* of this love and not its cause. This is the spring of all. In Nature first came the command, Let there be light, and inanimate nature was capable of receiving nothing else. But in grace the command is first—*Let there be love*. This is the great root truth up out of which all else shall grow—God loves me ;—He knows me and holds me dear to Himself, and seeks in all ways to uplift and bless and ennoble me.

Do you think of this infinite love as so shallow that it is dried up in the heat of the day ; as so exact and punctilious that we need be always afraid of presuming upon it ? Shall the little child be afraid of presuming upon the mother's love, and linger shivering in its want, and sorrowing in its fear ? Shall we think of the love of God as more limited than any love of earth ! The dewdrop less than the ocean ! Put the foot down firmly this day, for underneath thee is the everlasting love of God. Draw near, sure of His tenderest pity and readiest help. Look up with a glad, brave confidence that in all and over all and through all is this infinite love. God cannot help loving thee. His nature is love. His love doth encompass thee ; thou canst not escape from it, cannot get outside it ; ever it is about thee, thyself the centre of its gentle influence and care. Take it ; rest in it : all thine own. Thy life is to be the outcome and result of His great love to thee,



## II.

### THE LOVE OF GOD: THE GOD OF LOVE.

“God is love.”—I JOHN iv. 8.

#### PART II.

THREE words only; and each one easily spoken. A briefer sentence it would be difficult to find; yet how infinitely vast and wonderful is the truth which lies within its compass! The very centre and source of all things. Thence do all things come; by it are all things controlled and guided; thither as the end and blessedness of all do all things tend. This is the very heart of the Gospel. All of hope and all of help begins here—*God is Love.*

We have seen that this is the one great truth about God which we are fitted to know—*He that loveth knoweth God.* One thing we all know full well, and the most learned is he who knows it best—*how little we know.* I met with a sharp answer from an old woman, to whom I had said playfully, “You are old enough to know better.” “Ah, sir,” said she, with a smile and a sigh, “I am old enough to know *that knowing does not come with years.*” Alas! we are all of us old enough to know

that. For one thing of which we say doubtfully, "I know," there are ten thousand that I know not. And the limit of my power I reach as easily; and that which I know I often cannot do. *But love is infinite.* None ever yet reached the limit of love, and said of it, "*Thus far shalt thou go and no further.*" Look into the felon's cell, where sits one who has gone down to the lowest depths of transgression, until now in the dungeon alone he is cast out from the midst of men and there is none to pity. Ah, away up in some lonely chamber kneels an old grey-headed mother, her face all traced with her sorrow, and as the tears flow out before God she pleads for him, her son, her outcast son. / "They ~~take~~ against me," said an old woman one day, with quivering lip and sobbing grief—  
—"they ~~take~~ against me and say that I shouldn't do it. But, bless you, sir, *they* are only his brothers and sisters, and he will watch till they are out of the way, and then he will come creeping round and ask for a crust of bread. Bless you, sir, do you think I can help it? *Why, I am his mother.* And when he comes like that, if I had only a crust of bread in the world, and my life depended upon it, don't you think I would take it and give it to him right off, and die? Of course I would, sooner than see him starve." } Love even with us is infinite—like God. Therefore he that loveth knoweth God.

*Although this is the one truth about God which we can know, yet it is the last truth which we accept.*

Most men believe in the existence of God, in His power, in His wisdom. There are others who vaguely believe that He is good and kind. But there are few men who really think of God as love. And very many spend their time in putting up fences and limits to the love of God, doing that which none has ever yet been able to do for the love of man, as if it were a love beset with statutes, and thoughts of precedents, and dread of presumption. Listen—*When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him.* He who hath come to reveal the Father hath taught us thus to think of Him.

*God is Love.* It is the one truth for lack of which the world is perishing. If of all things that ever have been, or could be, I could have my choice, it should be this—to stand this day, and speak with a force that none could resist, and with an abiding conviction into the heart of every man and woman and child—SOUL, GOD LOVES THEE, HOLDS THEE DEAR TO HIS VERY HEART. GOD, THE GREAT GOD OF HEAVEN, BENDS OVER THEE, EAGER TO BLESS THEE, TO GIVE THEE HIMSELF, TO MAKE THEE WHOLE AND STRONG AND GLAD IN HIS LOVE.

Would that we believed it as God has taught it in His Word! The great power in the world to redeem men, to uplift, to ennoble men, is the power of love. To love, to be loved, is a restraint, a constraint, a transformation. Love is the true salvation. What hosts there are in this great city

going down swiftly into death because they think there is none to care for them! It is nothing to any one what becomes of them, so they are reckless, desperate, mad. And on the other hand what hosts there are about us to whom death should be welcomed and the grave be a coveted resting-place but for some little loved one for whose sake toil, suffering, sorrow are lightly and gladly endured!

*And yet what can it avail to tell of love?* Words may do for some things, but to hold love they are too little, too shallow, too coarse, too cold. And even if words could tell of it, who were the richer for hearing them? What avails to tell a hungry man of a banquet? To see and not to have may be an agony. Once in a storm at sea, when great waves threatened us with death and about us were some grim tokens of our peril, I saw neither waves nor wrecks. These were forgotten in the sight of green fields, and farm houses, and quiet woods, and the little row of whitewashed cottages that stretched down the winding hill to the shore;—all so plainly visible and yet so dreadfully far off! That was the cruellest thing that day. A sermon about the love of God, if it be a sermon only, is a stone that mocks one's hunger. Think of taking some little child, outcast, unloved, perishing, and telling it by touching story and in tenderest tones about the blessedness of a mother's love—and then sending the little one again upon its lonely way! Such a word were kind only when the love waits to complete the

story ; only when one can hurry through the words and prepare the heart, and then let the mother herself burst in to press the child to her bosom and wrap it about with love. That is ours. The Love of God is ours not in words only, but ours *in deed and in truth*; ours to accept it; to rest in it; to delight in it. Soul, bestir thyself to claim all this glorious, this unspeakable gift as thine own.

*How then may we make it ours?* Well, take the words and brood over them until the very Spirit of God speaks them to the heart. Turn them over again and again; set them in the light of the daily scenes and illustrations of love. "God is His own interpreter"—and only love can tell of love. To its anointed eye all things are revelations and emblems, and to its tuned heart every breath is music.

Come now, let us muse together upon the word until the fire kindle—*God is Love*.

GOD—I had thought of Him afar off in His majesty and splendour, too great for me to draw near to Him; too holy and too awful for my presence. He sat upon the Throne of His greatness in dazzling light and glory unapproachable. And I, so insignificant, so foolish, so sinful as I am, how dare I look toward Heaven? But God is Love. Love is simple. Love stands not on rigid etiquette. Love is approachable, familiar, kind. Love stoops, unconscious of its condescension. And lo, He comes, and bends over me and teaches me to call Him Father.



I thought He was angry, and that I had to bring Him costly sacrifices to appease His anger, and to turn aside His wrath by great entreaty, and tears and all humiliation and desperate struggles after my amendment. But *God is Love*. And love folds the little child within its arms and wraps it about with tenderest care and eager pity. And lo, this is God, our God, the great God of Heaven and Earth, Who hath a delight in us, and would have us come and rest for evermore within the deep blessedness of His Love.

*God is Love*. Speak it boldly. Not only kind is He; not gracious only; not even only *loving*—He is *Love*. His nature, His very Being is Love. His love depends upon no condition. It is not the result of Christ's intercession; it is not the outcome of the Saviour's death. It is not the reward of our penitence or faith; it is never the golden wages of our service. The great Love of God lies beyond and above all this. God is Love—it is His very nature. It is not what He may be to some: it is what He cannot help being to all. It is not a possibility only, but it is just an impossibility that He can be other than love. Let the heart speak it. Boldly claim it and rest in it. *God is Love*.

Love is not to a crowd; compassion, pity there may be for a multitude, *but love is separate; it is personal; it is distinct and peculiar*. God's love is like His sunlight, diffused throughout the heaven, catching the heights of the hills and crowning them

with ruddy gold and clothing them in purple. So it seems to us an easy and a natural thing for God to love some people; outstanding men and women whose goodness might make them dear to Him. But this is not all that the sun does. It climbs higher that it may creep lower—down the hill-sides further and further, until it lifts the mists of the valley and covers the meadows with its glory; and kisses the daisy and fills its cup with gold, and puts energy and strength into its very heart. God loves the good, the true, the pure, but His love rises higher that it may come down lower; and He loves *me—me*. I can wrap this love of His about me and claim it all as my own. *God is Love.* Do not grieve Him any longer by doubting it. Have you not gone lonely and burdened long enough for want of it?

*God is Love.* Is—eternity lies within the compass of that little word. *Is*—behind me for ever and ever it reaches, and away for ever and for ever it stretches before me. If love be love indeed, then is the verb to love a “defective verb,” yet defective rather because it is perfect—having but one tense, and that the *present tense* only. The love of which we say *it was* is no true love; *it is* or it never was. The love of which we think *it shall be* is a wearisome doubt. God’s love is an abiding and unchanging present—an everlasting *is*. This is our joy and security. This is nothing other than my little freehold, a bit of the everlasting upon which I may

make my home—a home not made with hands, which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God: an eternal Heaven. In all the uncertainties of life and changeable things of earth it is blessed indeed to hold a Hand that shall never let mine go; to rest in a Love that shall never be weary or worn out; to stand and look into the misty ages and to know that He is mine and I am His, for ever and for ever. This joy is ours if we will boldly accept it as our own.

Do we sigh within ourselves? "It cannot be for me. I have doubted, even denied Him. If I have admitted His existence, it has been to defy and even to hate Him in my anguish and fierce rebellion." Do not in any wise make light of thy sin, but yet do not make light of that which is even greater than thy sin—the infinite Love of God. Herein is love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Have you not seen the child in the agony of some suffering strike the father's hand that sought to relieve it, and cry out in its rage against the mother whose love made its pains a thousand times her own? What think you—that the father and mother have therefore put the child outside their love for this offence? Nay, verily. As well think that the darkness of the night should blot out the stars, as that our sin can quench the infinite love of God. That very darkness does but reveal their radiant glory, even as our sin gives room and opportunity

for the manifestation of His love. It is true, still true for thee and me, God is Love.

“Ah,” saith another, “I have been fickle, false, foul. I have sinned against Him. Pity may reach to weakness and to want. But for me what can there be but condemnation and despair?” Soul, *there is love—love for thee.* Love assured, unchanging love. Herein is the love of God, that while we were yet sinners God loved us. This is the wonder and glory of it. Christ’s standard for our love could not be lower than this—“*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute you and despitefully use you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven . . . for if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?*” And when once Peter wanted to sound the depth of this commandment the Lord Jesus gave him its measure. “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times?” Jesus saith unto him, “*I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*” If such be the standard for the disciple, what is the measure of that great source and fulness of all Love in the heart of our God!

Do not think of it as an opinion only; take it as a great fact which nothing can undo, nothing can unsay. *God is Love.* He is for thee, and not against thee;

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thy Helper and thy Friend. His tenderest Love, His infinite Pity are thine at all times as if there were no other. Turn to Him ; speak to Him ; come to Him, no matter how clumsily or how ignorantly or with what broken effort. His Love welcomes thee and longs to bless thee, and ignorance and error do not make thee one whit less welcome if thou wilt but come. Here is our hope ; our help ; our triumph—in His love. This is our God and Father—His Nature, His Being, Himself is Love.



### III.

#### *THE LOVE OF GOD: THE GOD OF LOVE.*

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”—I JOHN iv. 16.

#### PART III.

WE have already dwelt upon some phases of this great truth ;—that love is the only faculty in us which can know God ; that we can know the love of God as we can know nothing else concerning Him ; that this love known, believed, rested in is the source and the sustenance of our true life. That God knows me and holds me dear, and longs to help and bless me,—this brings me to speak to Him, to cast myself like the prodigal within His arms, greeted and encompassed by love. This we must have, or life is a burden of loneliness and mystery and fear ;—with a past that cannot die and that cannot be undone ; with desires and longings that are mocked by the feebleness and folly of life ; with a future where death alone is certain and the dread something beyond death—what have I for my hope and help ? Lo, the great God of heaven and earth loves me with a love that has no bounds ; He whose



wisdom can devise my truest help, and whose grace and patience can lead me into fullest blessedness, to Him I surrender myself for guidance and for service. Now I can hope; now I can stand; now I can triumph—for God is Love.

Now the question comes—*How may I know the love of God?* “We have known and believed the love which God hath to us,” cries the Apostle. How? Alas! our vision is dull. False thoughts of God hold us in bondage, prison us in darkness; and our sin makes us afraid. Yet we may learn it. He who came to show us the Father hath come to reveal this all-glorious truth not to the wise and prudent, but unto babes. Love is learned only of love. Let the heart be open to the whispers and hints of love that lie all about us. The best man is he who sees most of love everywhere. The worst and most hopeless is he who can see no love in anything. To the loving heart all things bring their tribute of love. Here it is supremely true that unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. The Lord Jesus has taught us to search the three great lesson-books of love—the pages of Nature; the homely teachings of the Family; and the great manifestation of love in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The first revelation of the Father which the Lord Jesus Christ gave us was when He went up into a mountain, up into its vantage ground; and there apart from the din and hurry of the city He sat and

taught. Before Him spread the beauty of the landscape, the green slopes dotted with flowers, the little villages that fringed the lake, and beyond them the blue waters arched by the deep blue sky. Here He bade His disciples look at the twittering swallows that swept in their swift flight ; they knew the time of their coming and found the provision waiting for them ; the ravens' croak sounded from the height, and it taught the same lesson of care ; and about them were the sparrows, the twittering sparrows, so plain, so commonplace—*your heavenly Father feedeth them*. Their Master and their Master only, but *our* Father ; dearer, infinitely dearer to the heart of God is every one of us.

He pointed them to the flowers—the flowers of the *field*, wild flowers which none tended, with none to nourish and none to protect them, the pride of no gardener, much less the dainty treasure of a hot-house ; flowers that the sheep trampled under foot, that the bleak winds withered. Here to-day, to-morrow gone for ever. The heavenly Father decked them in their wondrous beauty and gave them their rich fragrance. So we are to learn of His goodness, and thus is the heart to begin the exercise of its trust in Him.

He is a happy man indeed whose soul is kept open to the charm and message of these things ; to whom Nature, blotted and soiled and disfigured though it be by sin, has yet enough of the original inscription left for this to be read, writ large upon

it, *God is Love*. Love was of old and still is God's master-workman. There were tremendous forces at work when the round world was shaped—forces that rent out the valleys, and piled the mountains, and swept in mighty waves, and fused the solid rocks ; but Love was the clerk of the works. Love had to put his mark upon it or else nothing could pass. Love put the finishing touch upon all things before they were pronounced good, and added beauty to the use of things, and taught the birds their songs, and the brooks their rippling music, and the sea its chant of changeful tones ; and gave the flowers their dainty hues and breathed their sweetness into them ; and fitted all to minister not only to our good and service, but to make us glad. It is well when we can be still, and let these things speak to us. They do not strive nor cry ; neither is their voice heard in the streets. We need get away to hear it ; away up into the mount of the Lord that this vision of His goodness may pass before us.

*And let us try to help others to hear these messages from God.* There is a healing for many hearts in a breath of the country like the breath of God. There are thousands of houses in London where nothing insures such a welcome as a bunch of flowers. The very heart is on the latch at sight of them, the heart which suspicion has bolted and barred so long.

Amidst the new development of Christian socialism let us thank God for those—and let us try to help them—who are taking the men and women and

children of the great city into the country ; and not for a day only. And let us thank Him too for the Flower Mission, a Christlike work—bringing a bit of the sweet country to the beds in the hospitals and to the houses of the poorest.\* In all this there is a blessed message from God to the heart.

The second great lesson book in which we learn of God's Love is in *the homely teachings of the family life*. Scripture is full of figure and illustration and parable based upon it, alike in the Old Testament and in the New, but most vividly and most tenderly by Him who came to show us the Father.

The claim of the child and the care of the father is made the ground of prayer and the assurance of its success. The love of the father to the erring son is taken by Jesus Christ as the very crown of parables ; of all stories that earth ever heard, or surely Heaven either, this is the most touching. When once the Lord Jesus answered with apparent rebuff where He was wont to greet with tenderest welcome, was it not that He might bring out the strength and glory of a mother's love ? As the heathen woman came entreating for her little daughter, the disciples were annoyed, and whispered, "Send her away." I can think that Jesus said

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\* I would commend the example of a lady of high position who has had a number of poor women from the neighbourhood of Wardour Hall to spend a fortnight with her in the country. Five shillings a week will suffice to keep a sick or convalescent child under the care of some kindly cottager ;—a service which those whose families have enjoyed a month at the seaside might readily render.

within Himself, "What, think ye that I could if I would ! and think ye that I would if I could !" Surely betraying in the look and manner the love which the words seemed to lack, He turned to the woman and said—"It is not lawful to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs." Ah, love is wit and wisdom and victory. "Truth, Lord," said she, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." And then, as if the pity dammed back for a while had gathered a resistless force, it burst forth in floods of blessing—"Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

These broken bits of love amongst us spell out the name of God. I can best tell how God feels towards me by knowing the hold that the little child has upon a father's heart; sacred because it is ignorant and helpless, a thing "omnipotently weak." In the love that endures care and toil and sorrow and suffering for the children's sake, and which counts it all not self-denial, not even duty—forgets it all in the thought of them—there I learn of God. The only catechism in which I can know Him is in the daily, hourly ways of love. The great love that lives on through all shame and misery and want, yet never falters, never fails; whose last breath is a message of tenderest care, as if the years of grief had but enriched and ennobled love—there I can read of God. Of all things on earth—perhaps of all things in heaven—the nearest to God and the likeliest to Him is a mother's heart. The golden

ladder that leads from earth to heaven is love; and the angels that ascend and descend are love's messengers and ministers.

But all this, much as it is, is not enough. Though Nature in many of her moods does show us much of God's love, yet there are voices that come as angry contradictions—earthquakes, thunder crashes, wrecking storms break in terribly upon the holy calm which brooded over all and blessed it. There is about us music and gladness certainly; yet is there pain and suffering, a moan and dirge of anguish and fear. We cannot shut these things from us; it is not true love but blind selfishness and shallow sentiment which tries to forget them. There is confusion and mystery; virtue sometimes vanquished; vice victorious.

And in the family life, alas! the very name of father may come to be a terror only and a curse; and the very mother may be no blessing, but a shame only. We need another declaration of God's Love. It is here. "*No man hath seen God at any time; the Only-begotten which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.*" "*He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.*" "*Hereby perceive we the Love of God that He laid down His life for us.*"

The most deplorable thing under heaven surely is this—that this supreme manifestation of Love is so thought of and so set forth at times as that it is not only emptied of all love but turned into a very outrage upon love. *God so loved the world that*



*He gave His only-begotten Son*, that is the declaration of the Son of God Himself. Let us be quite sure that whatever interprets the mystery of the cross as anything other than love, perverts and destroys it. And this is indeed to destroy it, if we think of God sitting unmoved, and weighing out the penalty of our sins, and transferring the awful curse to be borne by Another. Is this love—the infinite love of God?

But the truth is not secured by denouncing falsehoods. To us it is everything to know and believe the love which God hath to us. What then is love, the highest, fullest, truest love of which we can think, or which we can wish for in the world? Shall we think of a world wherein everybody is true and good and perfect of *necessity*; where there should be the exact fulfilling of every duty; and so in all the world no sin, no fear, no wrong, no suffering? It might be so, certainly. It should be so if on every side man was controlled by a compulsion of right; bound by the golden fetters of goodness and truth, yet unconscious of the bondage because incapable of will; a world of machines wound up and timed exactly with the sun, warranted to go for three score years and ten without swerving a hair's breadth from the right. Creatures could keep truth as the stars keep time, by being *made to*. But there should be no victory, because there could be no temptation. No endurance, and therefore no development. No virtue, for lack of opportunity to

sin. Innocence indeed there should be everywhere, but innocence untried. Can we accept that as a vision of perfect love? A world of children only—nay, less than children—of animals perfectly obeying their instincts. Do we not rather with infinite thankfulness accept the thousand larger opportunities which make us men—the temptation and the possibility of sin with sorrow and suffering as its price, and with its opportunity of victory? Such a world as we have supposed would be incapable of love, of pity, of trust, of helpfulness—everything assured in its goodness, there could be no watchfulness, no deliverance, nothing that could ever erect us above ourselves, and transform us into the likeness of God.

Turn then to another vision of love. Here is a world in which man is trusted with this awful power of free-will; with its possibilities of evil as well as of good; with the opportunity of victory and development; and with the guards and penalties, the grim necessity of pain and suffering, of want and misery and death. And lo, into the midst of this world there comes the Almighty God, the Father of all. And He makes Himself One with us in our sorrow and our want, and takes upon Himself the curse which we have wrought, and reaches forth to us hands of Almighty help:—hands wherein are nail-prints of the cross. Hereby perceive we the love of God that He laid down His life for us. *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.*

*Herein is Love*—amazing and unutterable—in the whole story of the life and death of Christ. We stand at Bethlehem, and with adoring wonder we gaze upon Emmanuel—*God with us*. We listen to such words as never man spake; we follow Him as He goes about doing good, unwearied and almighty in blessing; we dwell upon the infinite compassion that reigns in all His life;—and there is revealed to us the vision of God. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,” said Jesus—“The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father that is in Me; He doeth the works.”

And in the Cross of Christ this love of God finds its uttermost and sublimest manifestation. It is not the transfer of the burden from man to the Saviour Jesus Christ, but the transfer of that burden to the very heart of the Almighty Father. Here is a mystery almost too sacred and awful for us to approach; yet here too it is true—he that loveth knoweth God. The keenest suffering, the sharpest agony upon earth is where love takes up the pain and grief of the beloved, and makes it a thousandfold its own. Yonder is Absalom caught and slain in the battle. But here is the grief, the anguish, within this chamber, where with broken heart one paces to and fro moaning within himself—“O, Absalom, my son! Would God I had died for thee, my son!” A contrast rather than a comparison in all but the father’s love, it is this Love which the Cross of Christ sets forth in its vastness. *Herein is Love.*

Thus, then, He Who has made us capable of love has revealed Himself as the Altogether Loveworthy, that He may win the whole strength of our Love. For love must be won, it cannot be commanded ; it cannot be coerced. And if love, such eager, constant, yearning love come forth to each of us from God, shall it be met only by our thought of it—and lightly forgotten ! Love is an appeal ; love is a claim ; love is a demand ;—which only love can meet. Dwell upon this wondrous love until all the heart go forth in love to Him ; and all the life is a simple glad endeavour in everything to make Him glad. Love cannot be content with duty or service, however pressed down and measured : it is intent on pleasing Him. Accept this great love of God as your own ; for we must begin with Him and not with ourselves. Believe in it ; drink of it ; feast on it ; live in it, until it beget within us a love to God which shall claim all the heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. Amen.



#### IV.

##### *WHAT WE WANT FOR LONDON: PERSONAL INTEREST.*

“It came to pass when I heard these words that I sat down and wept and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”—*NEHEMIAH* i. 4.

THE story opens with the sad picture of Israel's condition at this time. They had been carried into captivity, broken, and scattered. The Land of Promise is subject to a heathen king, and is peopled by strangers. Jerusalem, the Holy City, is in ruins—the walls are but heaps of rubbish, the gateways burned with fire. And as the heathen rides by he flings his head in scornful derision, “Is this the city that was called Beautiful, the joy of the whole earth!”

Ezra had gone with a company of Jews to Jerusalem some years previously, and though the Temple had been rebuilt and the holy vessels restored, yet the people were in a sorry plight. Opposed and oppressed on every hand, some of them had sunk into such poverty that the very children were sold for bread. It seemed as if the attempt had better be given up altogether, and the city left in despair.

A few months only go by, and the whole scene is changed—a change complete and wonderful as when the pitiless winter gives place to the gladness of the spring. In place of ruin and rubbish-heaps now rise the stately wall and gateway. Where a few sorrowing ones had gone with bowed heads and timid steps there rings the music of a thousand workmen. Everybody has caught the holy impulse. The apothecary leaves his drugs and mixes mortar. The goldsmith forgets his jewellery to handle rough stones. The scribe drops the pen and plies the trowel. The very daughters work with maidenly modesty and right good will. The High Priest and his sons consecrate the work by their example. The very ruler reckons it an honour to toil as a mason and to repair the walls of Jerusalem. So many hands at work, and each with so much heart, put another look upon the place, and the enemies who laughed yesterday at “these feeble Jews” actually grow alarmed and threaten them. But these builders are as brave to fight as they are ready to toil, and the sword hangs close at hand. So they wrought from dawn till eve and watched from eve till dawn, and so the walls were finished. The record tells how thoroughly it was done. “They laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.” Again the streets were busy. Life and property were secure. And the very heathen knew of a truth that God was in the midst of His people and prospered them.



What had happened to produce so complete and swift a transformation? Had some great king taken up their cause? Had some warrior risen up—another Gideon or David—and led them forth to victory? Had some prophet of fire come amongst them; or had some mother in Israel, like Deborah of old, inspired them with a new courage? No; less than that, much less, as we measure things; but more than that, much more, as we *should* measure them. What then? One man takes the matter right in upon his heart and mourns about it. One man goes to God about it in earnest, pleading prayer. *Then* the success follows, assuredly, as a matter of course.

Away in Shushan, in a position of great trust and high honour, is Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king. One day a company of Jews arrives from Jerusalem, bringing probably a despatch from the governor. Eagerly Nehemiah hastens to ask after the welfare of the city. They tell him of the sad state of things—of broken walls, of gateways burned with fire. The words go sinking down into his heart and fill him with grief. He carries the sad news as a great burden, and sits down mourning and fasting. Then he takes the burden, and casts it upon the Lord. *I prayed unto the God of Heaven.* Then and there began the prosperity of Jerusalem—in that sad heart and in that praying soul. Those tears were the springs of rivers of blessing. Fear not, Israel, one man weeps for thy griefs, one man pleads with God

on thy behalf; there is the pledge and assurance of thy prosperity.

I do not want now to dwell upon the condition of this great city about us—the hosts of heathen in our midst, who have no thought of God in their minds; the scenes of riot and debauchery that nightly disgrace this neighbourhood—the sweeping and surging of a sea of iniquity; the social condition of thousands of families, living herded together, where decency is scarcely possible; the troops of poor little children, going breakfastless to school; the multitude to whom sin seems the only escape from starvation, and starvation the only escape from sin; the crowd of hungry and homeless ones amongst us—all that is awfully, unutterably sad. But all that is not the saddest thing. The saddest thing is the easy-going religious people who live in the midst of these things, and yet whose religion does not make them troubled about these sorrows and sins. People who come and go in sight of it all, and it never costs them more than an occasional sigh, and a still more occasional subscription. The saddest thing in London is that to many people religion means nothing but a dreadful selfishness—a being made very comfortable in this world, and then going to be happy for ever and ever. For the sins and sorrows of this great city, and indeed of the whole world, there is but one remedy. It is not in organisation, missions, sermons, endless activities. It is when every man who is a Christian, *because he is a*

*Christian* shall take in upon his heart the sins and sorrows of the poor world about him. Who of us hath ears to hear the pitiless application which the Apostle makes of Christ's example? *Hereby perceive we the love of God, that He laid down His life for us.* There most of us stop, but without break or pause the Apostle can find no stopping place short of this, WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR THE BRETHREN. Of this be assured, here is the only condition of the Church's victory and of the world's salvation—*deep personal interest, importunate prayer, and earnest individual effort.*

I want to fetch this incident out of the dead past and set it right down here amidst the religious people of to-day and in sight of the needs of this great London. In place of the court of the Eastern king, filled with the travellers gaily robed, amidst the kneeling camels, we see the men and women who are about us to-day. Come, let us go forth amongst them and look for this personal interest, or what is put in place of it.

Here is one who has heard these evil tidings of to-day, and of a thousand other ills that afflict and disgrace our land—of the curse of drunkenness, of the gambling, of the poverty and wretchedness. "It is sad," he says, "very sad indeed; and I do wish that I could help you. But you see I can do so very little. I will double my subscription for a year, and will try to get what I can; but of course I am not in a position to do anything more. You see, I am

not a prophet, or then indeed I might go forth and preach to the people, and no doubt should rouse them from their lethargy. I am not a priest, and must not take upon myself a task which belongs to others. I am not a warrior, and cannot head a host of soldiers, or no doubt I should fight. I don't see that I can do anything." And the man is going away quite satisfied that he at any rate has done his duty. And then I think some simple man steps up and lays his hand upon his shoulder. "There is one thing we can do; we can pray about it." Then there comes the smile, the amiable smile which we keep for weak well-meaning people—"Of course, my friend; of course. We all do that, you know." And the adversity continues, as it always does when people pray without personal interest.

Again, another group rises before me. Here is some man who has heard the evil tidings, and his personal interest neither leads to prayer nor to effort, but works itself off in fault-finding. I see the flushed face, the knitted brows, the eyes that flash. "Really, you know, this is too bad. There must be some wretched mismanagement. Whatever are they about, to let things come to a pass like this? They ought to be ashamed of themselves." Personal interest flying into a rage will not mend matters; it will only add to the misery a further mischief of ill-will, and bitterness, and strife. It is such a real relief to rail against somebody else when things go wrong that most people who do it think they have

quite done their duty, and feel a kind of lofty superiority. Then the anger cools into a kind of scorn—"But there; it is only what I expected from the first. What is the good of wasting your strength and energy upon a set like that?" Brother, better pluck out thy tongue by the roots and go henceforth dumb, than live never putting a finger to help men, and only for ever finding fault with those who are trying, though it be amidst much failure, to do some good in the world.

And again there comes the simple man.

"Hadn't we better pray about it?" he asks. We know what the answer would be. "Pray!" says the angry man, more angrily, as if it were an insult to hint at such a thing. "Really do be practical. God helps those who help themselves, sir." And so the misery is made worse, much worse by personal interest that stops short of prayer.

But I see another. The thorough man of business, perfect type of the Englishman in this nineteenth century. He has heard of the condition of things and looks very serious. Then he beckons the little company to follow into his office, and he seats himself at his desk. "Let us have the matter before us in black and white. You want so many yards of wall, so many feet high and so many feet thick. Dear me, this is an immense undertaking. You will need so many loads of stone and so much timber, and I don't see where it is to come from; and you will want a great many hands; and then only a few

of you are able to do anything, and all are so poor ; and the times so hard as they are, too. And then the enemies are so numerous, and they have so much influence. I really do not think there is a chance."

Then comes the simple man again. God bless him and send us a million of them. "Supposing we prayed about it, sir, God could send us the stones and the beams, ay, and the workmen too ; and I believe He would if we asked Him." What a provoking fellow this is !

"How foolishly you do talk !" says one of the company, angrily. "Do you think that God is going to set up the wall by a miracle ? or that He is going to send His angels to build it ?"

"Well, why not ?" asks the simple man.

"Why not, indeed !" say they all.

"You don't understand business," cries the first.

"Really, sir, you have no logic in you," says a second.

"This is downright fanaticism," mutters a third.

"Why not, sir !" says the thorough man of business,— "why, because God works by instruments and we must find them."

But the simple man shakes his head quite unmoved. He cannot help thinking that God can find the instruments better than we can if we only went to Him.

But happily in the groups of to-day there are others more like him of old than these are. In

almost every church there are some men and more women to whom such tidings of sin and sorrow are a great grief. They, too, sit and mourn. The light dies out of life as they dwell upon the stories of misery and want and sin. Position, honour, prosperity, are but little to them if the woes of our poor humanity go all untended. They make a grief and care of these things. They can talk of little else, and sometimes sleep is driven from their eyes, and sometimes their very dreams give shape to their sorrows. Well, better anything than the easy-going indifference which passes all the grief unheeded whilst it goes singing of heaven as its home. Surely it is sad indeed if the sorrows of the world do not make us sad. God sends His angel still through the cities to set a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. Do you ask what the mark is? It is God's way of taking the measure for a crown. Yearning pity for men is the truest mark of sympathy with Christ, and is the truest fitness for service. It is well indeed when personal interest leads us to mourn. But it is ill when the mourning stops short of importunate prayer. "*I prayed before the God of Heaven.*" Let sorrow for the sins and sorrows of the world drive us to God. There we find what Nehemiah found—the precious promises and the presence of Him who now and here doth wipe away all tears from the eyes. He is the man ready for service whose yearning pity has



driven him to God, and who comes forth calm and triumphant, leaning upon the arm of the Almighty. Do not let personal interest end only in sorrow. Again I hear the simple man with his advice: "Brother, pray about it—keep praying."

Would that there were nothing more—no group whose counsel and suggestion is worse than those we have heard, for surely they are bad enough. Think again of the arrival of the little company with the evil tidings: and the king's cupbearer comes forth to meet them with a sigh. "I am sorry, very sorry, to hear of all this. I wish with all my heart that things were otherwise. But what can I do? My position is very peculiar, very." [Everybody's position is very peculiar when he wants it to be.] "If I begin to trouble myself about this matter, the king, who is dreadfully suspicious, will think that I am plotting some mischief against him, and I shall lose my head. I am sorry that I cannot help you, but you see it is really quite impossible." In which case the cupbearer might have made a large fortune, every halfpenny of which he would have left behind him.

Then I think the simple man comes forth once more. "Pardon me, my lord; do not you think that the God of Israel has placed you where you are, not for your own sake, but for His glory and the advancement of His kingdom?"

"Really," cries one of the company, a sort of Mr. Worldly Wiseman—I know him well—"it is

impertinent to talk to his lordship like that. But, my lord," and the voice sinks to a whisper, "there is one little suggestion that has occurred to me. You have a good deal to do with the king. Perhaps, my lord, you could watch your chance, and some day, when your lordship has a very choice vintage, and when the king's heart is merry within him, you can name it to him, and tell him how glad we should be of any little help. Of course it is for the good of the Church, or I would not suggest it."

Then let the simple man bow his head in shame. For the good of the Church! Whose Church? The Church of the God of Heaven? Alas, alas! how hideous a thing is religion when it severs itself from God, and has faith in anything—everything—sooner than in Him!

O it is good, it is blessed to turn again to this man of God, and to try and catch the holy influence of his example. Nehemiah goes right away to God and takes this matter with him and lays it down there. He gets low down before the Lord, confessing the sins of the people. He pleads day after day for three months. Then one day he stands before the king with thoughts that passed even there to the sorrows of Israel. Full of suspicions the king turned quickly round and asked: "Why is thy countenance sad?" Then he told the story of his sorrows with words that moved the heart of the king and of the queen. "For what dost thou make request?" asks the king right graciously. With an

arrow-flight of prayer to God he boldly put his case.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Come and see the power of prayer.* To-day there is much ado about the palace in Shushan. The king with his attendants moves to the palace-gate. The queen with her companions watches from the window. There is the prancing of horses and the clatter of armour, and the captains move to and fro. The sealed despatches are placed in safe keeping. And now the proud procession moves forward—look at it. All that for poor, despised Israel! For her the cupbearer rides forth with horsemen and chariots; for her these despatches are written with orders for timber from the king's forest enough and to spare. Now come again with the little companies to which we have listened; bring them all hither and let them look upon it with shame and wonder. Take them again only nine brief months after and let them see the walls finished. The city rings with its glad praise to God, blest with the promise of a greater glory and a richer joy than that which Israel had known of old. And now fetch hither the simple man of faith and honour him, as his eyes glow with tears of gladness and his heart runs over with praise.

That is what we want, *deep personal interest and pleading with God*. Prayer is prayer still, mighty with the might of the Almighty. We want men and women of God who will take this London upon

their hearts and plead for it daily. Men and women in our towns and villages, whose sons and daughters are in this great city with its perils. Men and women who think they can do little, but who can do most of all by their prayer. Men and women who feel that they have no chance of filling any place in the forefront of the battle, but who can nerve those who are here, and help by their prayers to secure a greater victory. If I could do what I would this day, it should be to lay this million-peopled city upon the hearts of the people of God throughout the land, and to get them to set apart some time daily to pray for London. Let those amid the hallowed quiet of their homes pray for those in the busy whirl of its crowded streets. Let those who are screened in blessed safety pray for those who are daily and hourly beset with temptation ; let those who are fenced about with virtue and hedged with holy influence plead for those whose earliest days make sin a horrible familiarity. Pray for London. Day and night—from lonely field and highway, in private prayer and when the family kneel together—pray for this great London, so mighty for evil, so mighty for good. From counter, and desk, and office, let the prayer keep going up—GOD SAVE LONDON. Never yet has mighty victory been won by the Church but there has been this deep personal interest and importunate prayer. For the sake of our great Lord and Master, and in pity and sorrow for this vast London, will

you who read this give yourself up to this work—for work it is, very real and earnest work—daily pleading with God on behalf of this great city? Thus can the poorest enrich us with the finest gold, and the weakest strengthen us with strength Divine, and he who is far off labour together with us, and with us share our joy and crown in the day of victory.



## V.

### WHAT WE WANT FOR LONDON: PERSONAL EFFORT.

“Every one over against his house.”—NEHEMIAH iii. 28.

WE have already dwelt upon deep personal interest and earnest prayer as the first requirements in this new work. To-day I go on to the next thing we need—PERSONAL EFFORT. *They repaired the wall, every one over against his house.*

The first suggestion of the text is a very matter-of-fact one—that in Jerusalem, however sad the condition of things in other respects, the people seem to have had a home, or at least a chamber, to build over against; but the mischief in London is, that there are so many people who have neither house nor chamber. Heaven send us right speedily a Home Rule Bill for London, whereby every worthy man shall have a home to rule. This is at bottom of the social disturbances and the widespread tendency to disturbance. Men are law-abiding just as they have something to abide by. When they have nothing, no change can do them harm and may do good, so that there is a natural faith in social earth-

quakes and volcanoes—it seems their only chance. This is at bottom, too, of very much of the evil that we deplore. Drunkenness comes less from the drink itself than from drinking in the public-houses. And yet ask yourselves, Where, for the most part, can men go whose rooms are squalid and miserable? And as for lust and degradation, how is it possible that the children should grow up in any beauty of thought and feeling where decency is impossible, and where families are herded together as men do not suffer their horses or cattle to be herded? Every improvement in our great city pulls down the tenements of the poor, and sends the unhappy tenants to crowd still more the crowded houses, and to compete more fiercely for the limited accommodation. Let no Christian ask—What have *we* to do with this? It is as Christians that we have to do with it. What is the good of professing a religion that demands love to our neighbour, if it really is nothing to us whether our neighbour has got a roof over his head or a bed to lie on? A bed to lie on! Mr. Peter Thompson, of the East End Mission, told me that his congregations were somewhat smaller on wet Sundays than in fine weather. I was surprised to hear it. “Your people have neither silks nor satins to spoil,” I said, “and in wet weather I should have thought that more of them would have sought the shelter of your hall.”

“Well,” said he, “I could not understand it for some time. At last I found the reason was this—



that so many of my congregation have no beds to lie upon ; and if they get wet, you see, they have to lie down in their wet clothes all night."

Depend upon it, if men and women are compelled to live in conditions where all self-respect is impossible, they will not keep much respect for other people. Let who will sneer at paternal legislation, in Christ's name we Christians should demand that somehow industrious men and women should be well and decently housed. And they who sneer must admit that it is in all ways wiser, and even cheaper, to try to provide houses for the homeless, than for them to keep the city in terror and to disturb the business of our great thoroughfares. I do not forget that there are difficulties—great difficulties involved ; but I dare not believe that in the nature of things anything essential to the well-being of the people is impossible. Thank God for the clear and kindly voice of the Press in this matter ; and people and press can compel legislation on this subject. Let us Christians look earnestly to it with all our hearts. It is but a one-handed gospel, and that an exceedingly awkward and left-handed gospel, that offers men a home in heaven when, for the present, it is of so much more importance that they should find a decent home in London.

The words suggest in the next place *the opportunities of city life*. It was because Jerusalem was a city that it needed a wall ; and the greater the city the greater the need ; and the more needed it

was, the more valued was the service of those who built it. It was a scene of busy and blessed co-operation—goldsmiths and apothecaries, priests and scribes, men and maidens, all working for the city's good. This is the advantage of the city—*this opportunity of service*. The very purpose of men thus living together in vast masses is for easy communication—that they may be able to serve each other. It is true in many senses that "God made the country and man made the town," just as God made the marble and man made the statue. And in tenderer and sweeter senses it is true; and because God made the country it is perhaps easier there to commune with God, as Isaac went into the fields to meditate. And because man made the town it is the fitter place for serving our fellow-man. I am not going to set them one against the other. Let us bless God for the sweetness and rest and beauty of the country; but do not let any of us cry out against the city. Christ loved the country, but His delight was in the habitable parts of the earth. He went into the country for meditation and communion; but He came to the city for service. "I must *needs* go up to Jerusalem," said He. Its hosts drew Him resistlessly; His pity urged Him. There the wants and sorrows of the land were crowded and concentrated, and there He must needs be. So, then, accept it gladly. This contact with others in this crowded London is our opportunity for service. There is a miserable way of treating this condition

of things. Instead of seeing in it an opportunity for service, there is sometimes a tendency to whine over its temptations and trials, and to make much of its perils. What do you think of this little group who are talking together in melancholy tones? "Poor young fellow! you have heard about him, haven't you? In the midst of such trials and temptations, all alone too, and with so much opposition to encounter."

"Whom do you mean?" asks one.

"*Why, David going out against Goliath.*"

Keep your pity. Envy him if you will. Pray God to give you such a chance of glorifying Him, and such courage when the chance comes. Young men, accept your position in this great city as an opportunity for heroic service for Christ—such an opportunity as you will never have again. You may live to be rich, perhaps, and to occupy positions where every one will look up to you. Very well, *then* it will be quite possible for you to render blessed service. But you can do *now* what you cannot do *then*. You can set yourself to do for Christ a service which will gladden the whole life, and heighten heaven. This lion of temptation and difficulty overcome in Christ's name, like Samson's lion of old shall be filled with honey—and out of the eater shall come forth meat, and out of the strong shall come sweetness. Accept your position from Christ; give it with all its possibilities to Him; use it always, everywhere for Him. Doubt-

less amongst the many young men gathered here there are not a few from the country. You must press up more nearly to Christ here; the current runs stronger. For myself I never knew the brotherliness of Jesus Christ and the sweetness of intimacy with Him until I came as a young man to London. It is an opportunity of knowing Jesus in His fulness of helpfulness, and it is an opportunity of showing our love and devotion such as we may never know again. I do urge you all to a solemn and definite act of surrender. To-day, away in the quiet of your own room give yourself right up to Jesus Christ, the Captain of your salvation. Pledge yourself in his strength to be His brave soldier and servant. About us are many champions of the devil, who boast of their badness and glory in their shame. Will you thank God for an opportunity of showing bravery and lofty courage for Jesus Christ? This is your opportunity. Make the most of it.

*And now I want us to get on the wall and to look at the workmen and their work.*—And, first, my eye falls upon the leader. His enthusiasm seems to kindle every workman. He is everywhere with his counsel and encouragement. His presence is an inspiration. Fear flies away when he speaks, and at the thought of him the wearied find new energy. There is much in that. Get a minister who can kindle your enthusiasm. Find a man that gets hold of you and helps you, and when you have

found him stick to him. Much, very much, depends upon the human minister of the Word. The very tones and looks start up to warn or to entreat or to encourage us. In a recent life of F. W. Robertson there is a beautiful testimony to this power of human help. The writer tells us that in the course of his inquiry amongst those who had known Robertson as their pastor, he called upon a small tradesman, who took him into his inner room and showed him a portrait of the great preacher. "There," said the man, "whenever I am tempted to do anything that is not thoroughly right and fair, I step in and look upon that picture, and the memory of his looks and words makes me scorn every mean thing for his sake." Such power may be rare indeed. But power to help men, really and greatly, every minister may have. In this work of repairing over against your own house few things will help you so much as to find a minister who strengthens everything that is good within you, who girds you for service, who can send you away with a new and deepened love to the Saviour, and a new and stronger hold of Him as your own. Thank God for power thus to help men, wherever it is found.

And, standing on the walls still, *look at the work*. It is very coarse and common work. There is no music in it, no artistic design, no dainty carving, no rich beauty. Building a wall is exceedingly homely and prosaic. A man holding a rough stone and chipping it here and there with his trowel until it

is fitted for its place, and then depositing it in the bed of mortar. It is work without any charm, dull, monotonous work—very commonplace. Exactly ; that is why we want to look at it. The service and glory of Jesus Christ need precisely this, *that the common dull work of every day be done for Him*. When every man repaired over against his own house it was apt to be homely work, house work. This is how the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem are to be built. What, think you that the angels of God, with white robes and gleaming wings, in their stately ranks and with majestic strength, do build these walls with pearl and stones exceeding precious ? Or that heroes set in the high places of the earth, and with the eyes of all upon them as the champions of God, alone are trusted with this service ? No, thank God ; it is not so. These are the builders of the fair City of God—hard-working men and women who get up in the morning with this resolution : “ Now, Lord Jesus, I have to-day to extend Thy kingdom, and to strengthen the walls of Zion. I thank Thee that I need no other position than that in which Thou hast placed me.” Not angels and splendid heroes—but come and see this man at the counter, who is doing an honest day's work for Christ's sake, never swerving a hair's breadth from the truth, whether it pays or whether it does not pay—those are the solid stones and true workmanship which do set up the walls of Zion. Here again is the young man, the young woman,

laughed at sometimes for being so particular, yet making little of it for His sake, and trying to find room for love and kindly helpfulness. These are the builders of God's City who in all the round of commonest daily life do set themselves to serve the Lord in faithfulness, in goodness, in true brotherliness, in brave patience and joy. The common daily life consecrated to Christ is that which makes men believe in religion ; and they without the city walls do look within and sigh for its blessedness and rest.

And notice further, that it was this repairing of the wall every man over against his house *which gave the city its security*. What was the good of this man in the fifteenth verse doing his part so thoroughly—"But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun ; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David"—what of all that if the man of whom we read in the thirtieth verse, Meshullam, the son of Berechiah, had not repaired the wall over against his chamber ? It was not much use shutting the enemies out at one place if they could find elsewhere a gap through which they could swarm at their pleasure. Burglars as a rule do not break in at the front door or through the parlour windows ; it is usually some neglected little window at the back somewhere that suits their purpose. The safety of the City of God is in every man diligently repairing

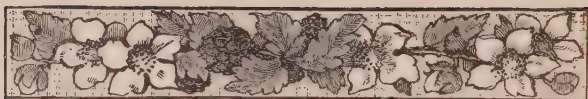


over against his own house. We may set up the evidences of our Christianity like the stately gates, we may buttress it with proofs and make it strong with our logic—"the locks thereof and the bars thereof." We may plant our great guns upon it and defy all foes to come that way. But what if the man who hears us to-day, to-morrow comes across some heavenly-minded dawdler? "If that is your religion," he cries, "I think I am better without it." What if a man goes home convinced by the strong arguments he may have heard, and he finds there some selfish and surly professor of religion, ill-tempered and disagreeable? Why, the work is broken down again and the enemies swarm in at the breach. We do every one carry in our keeping the glory of our Christ; and every one of us is responsible for that bit of the wall *over against his own house*.

I must linger yet a moment longer with these workmen. Here is one of them, I can think, not quite well pleased with what I have said. "Pardon me, dear sir, but you have surely made a mistake. You called the work dull, monotonous, commonplace, that it has no music in it and no joy." And as he speaks his eye flashes and his face lights up with gladness. "Ah, for my part, I never heard such music as the ringing of these trowels. I never saw such beauty as in this rising wall. Do you not know that it is our holy city, Jerusalem, wherein are the sepulchres of our fathers, the centre and

home of Israel's glorious memories and yet more glorious hope? Work! no; it is rest, peace, joy, heaven—anything but dull and commonplace toil."

The greatest blessedness of life is to catch that spirit. To have a love for Christ so complete and constant that it seeks in everything His service and glory. A divided heart is ever seeking to reconcile claims that cannot be reconciled; for ever jealous alternately of each and yet desiring that each shall be indulged—the world and Christ. "*Whatsoever ye do, do all for the glory of God,*" this is the power that can turn everything to gold. Do you sigh sometimes that your life is so empty of the lofty and sublime, that it has so little opportunity for the heroic impulses that sometimes thrill the dullest of us? Christ hath redeemed our lives from their littleness by the opportunity of loving and serving Him. He seeks that which He can create and sustain, a love that shall take all that comes as from Him, and that shall do all that is done as for Him, and so is the soul let into the sweetness of heaven's music. In such a life of whole-hearted service there is a strength, a rest, a triumph like that of the angels who serve Him in His holy temple. Commonest things are hallowed by the thought of His good pleasure. Here, as everywhere in the religious life, the complete surrender of ourselves and of our all to our gracious Saviour is the one secret of its blessedness and joy. Then shall the work be well done, and every man shall repair "over against his own house."



## VI.

### *A PARABLE FOR TO-DAY.*

ONCE upon a time there was a city in much need. Many of the people were perishing in hunger and poverty. There was strife and ill-will. Little children went forth to steal and lie, to suffer and die. Drunkenness turned homes into hovels; and men and women into fiends; and life itself into a curse. Yet elsewhere in the city dwelt the rich, who spent their wealth in self-indulgence and costly entertainments: the brilliant glare and splendour making a hideous contrast with the squalor and misery of the poor. The rich were haughty and scornful: the poor were envious; and ever grew the gulf between them deeper and wider, until the state of things was one of deadly peril.

Now, in this town there dwelt one Pity. His soul was filled with exceeding sorrow, alike for the weariness of the rich, who failed to find in their wealth that which they sought, and yet more for the poor, who, in the midst of extravagance, perished with hunger.

It chanced one day that as Pity brooded over

these things there came unto him the King of that land, and said: "Thinkest thou, Pity, that the ills and sorrows of this people can be cured?"

Then Pity sighed and looked up with a troubled face: "My Lord, I would that I could do something to relieve them."

"Thou canst do much," said the King.

"Alas! I know not that I can do anything," said Pity, very sadly.

"Seest thou my palace on the hill-top yonder?" the King asked, pointing to it.

"Yes, my Lord," answered Pity wondering.

"Well, there is all that this people need. There is silver and gold; there are stores of brotherly love; there is power for the healing of the nation, authority to cast out all devils; there are gifts of peace, and hope, and purity—all for which thine heart longs. There is joy for the sad, and health for the sick, and life for the dead. *All that is therein do I freely give to thee for the welfare of this city.* It is thine—all thine; go up and possess it."

Now Pity was so overwhelmed at the grace and favour of the King that he set his eyes on the Palace and could think of nothing else. All that was his! gold and precious treasures, crown jewels and robes! Ah, there should be no needy ones now. And before him danced visions of delight. Poverty was chased away; the thousand evil things were remedied, and blessings streamed forth everywhere,

So it came about that Pity did not notice that the King laid in his hand a piece of rusty iron. When he turned himself about the King was gone.

"What is the meaning of this?" Pity asked himself, looking at it curiously. And seeing some old letters roughly graven on it he read the words: "ALL GOETH RIGHT WHEN I AM BRIGHT."

"I know not where this came from," said Pity, "nor can I tell of what use it is. One thing is certain—to a man who hath great stores of wealth like mine, a palace and all that is therein, a bit of rusty iron can be of no worth." And flinging it lightly from him Pity hurried away up the hill-side to the splendid gift which was his own. At first he walked about its gates, looking up with wonder, and thinking of a thousand ways in which he should bless the citizens. Then he passed beneath the walls and looked at its massive buttresses and springing towers. "And it is mine," he whispered to himself, "all mine, with which to bless the people." So on he went, and right around its vast extent, until by-and-bye he stood again at the great front gate.

"Now let me see its treasures, and think how I can best deal with them," he cried, boldly putting his hand upon the massive handle.

*But the gate was locked, and he could not enter.*

It was strange that the gift should be so freely given, and yet the principal entrance should be closed. However, it would be no great matter to

pass to another gate. And standing before it with all confidence Pity turned the heavy handle. But it was of no use ; that, too, was fastened.

"I cannot understand this," said Pity, beginning to feel annoyed. "It is no use my claiming the palace for my own if I cannot get through the gate. I will try the next."

Away he hurried along by the walls of the castle, and by the moat, and then across a drawbridge. He seized a great iron ring that hung from a lion's mouth, and turned it. He heard the heavy latch lifted, and the echoes of it went ringing through the hollow places. But there, too, it was all in vain. That door was fastened. Angrily now he seized the handle and shook the door to and fro, but again only to be mocked by the echoes.

There was a fourth gate away on the other side. It was some distance off, and the entrance to the back part of the palace. It was not like the King's grace to grant him admission by that way, when the whole castle was his own. But thinking that entrance better than none, he set out for it. His way led through woods and across ditches ; and after a weary walk he reached it—a double gate of iron. He lifted the latch there too, and pushed hard, but only to find once more that the gate was fastened as firmly as the others.

Then did his heart sink within him. All the brilliant visions of blessing men had ended in cruel deception and wrong. With a heavy heart he traced

his way back to the main entrance, and leaned wearily against it.

There below him lay the city with its needs. Beneath those very roofs were the sorrows that he had hoped to heal, the wants that he longed to relieve: there the men and the women and the children perishing for the lack of that which lay within here, and which, indeed, was his, and yet neither he nor they were the better for it all.

The sun was setting, but he lingered on, bewildered that the King had mocked him thus. The stars came out in the deep blue overhead, though the golden glory still lingered in the western sky.

"*Alas, and yet not mine!*" he muttered to himself; "*so rich, and yet not rich, all the poorer because I cannot get at my riches.*"

So at last Pity went down to his lowly home, still longing that he could bless the people, and mourning that his hopes were thus deceived. After a while he fell asleep.

Now as he slept he dreamed that he was sitting outside the main entrance of the castle, when again the King came on his way. And Pity could scarcely greet his Lord, for the sense of the wrong that burned within him.

Then did the King look sternly upon him as he asked, "Whose is this castle, with its wealth and plenty?"

"I suppose, my Lord, it is mine," said Pity, sorrowfully.



"Thine!" said the King; "then dost thou count it no sin that thou canst have all this as thine own, and yet be thyself in such sorry plight, and suffer the people to perish thus?"

"My Lord," sighed Pity, "it is mine, and yet not mine; for I cannot enter it."

"Why?" cried the King. "Did I not put into thine hand that which should have opened every door, and have put thee in possession of all its treasure? 'ALL WERE RIGHT IF THAT WERE BRIGHT.'"

Then saying these words to himself Pity woke. And as he thought of his dream he sprang up. "What! that rusty bit of iron that I threw lightly aside; could it indeed have been the master-key? I do remember that those same words were graven upon it. 'ALL GOETH RIGHT WHEN I AM BRIGHT.'"

At the dawning of the day Pity went forth and stood upon the spot where the King had met him, and sought diligently amidst the bushes. And after awhile he found the bit of iron, rusty and soiled. "Good use shall keep it shining," he cried.

Then he hurried up the hill, and at once the outer gate was opened by the key. Door after door was flung back, and he stood within the palace. Here was more than he had ever dreamed of—more than he could ask or think.

Straightway he chose his servants from amongst the people, and he bade the old men help him with their counsel. And wisely distributing his gifts, the needy were relieved and many miseries were driven

forth from the midst of the people. And his authority and store of graces and of gifts put down the ills and brought in all prosperity and gladness.

And Pity set up over the great gate his crest—it was a key—and thereon was graven this legend :

“ALL GOETH RIGHT WHEN I AM BRIGHT.”

Brother, God has given to thee this key ; with it thou mayest enrich the world. Where is it, and what art thou doing with it ? All God's great love and wisdom and power are the palace we may call our own, enriched with ten thousand precious promises. Our own, and yet not ours, except as we use this master-key of Prayer.



## VII.

### *SOME MODERN THEORIES TRIED BY AN OLD EXPERIMENT.*

I HAD gone down into the country to spend a week with my good friend M. N. He prides himself on his breadth of thought—that is, when applied to the latest and most outrageous of moral or psychical theories. Spiritualism, Agnosticism, Positivism, were sure to meet with a hearty welcome and a handsome entertainment.

“No man is wholly a fool, sir,” he said (somewhat fiercely; but it was only his manner). “That is to say, no *sincere* man. And whatever he thinks must have something in it, if it satisfies him.”

“Quite so,” I said; “but what is the test of sincerity?”

“O, you know that intuitively, of course! You can tell a good sovereign by its ring.”

“Well, I am an old-fashioned believer, and find a blessed satisfaction in my belief, but——” and I hesitated.

“Fiddlesticks!” said the host; “there is not one left now.”

Such was the master of the house, liking to think

that he could sweep the moral horizon with an eagle's gaze, and soar to heights and sink to depths with the ease of an eagle-pinion ; whilst all who came short of this were to him pitiable as caterpillars on a cabbage leaf, or burrowing moles whose peculiar mental constitution took them into the dark underground instead of gazing at the sun.

Opposite me at dinner sat Colonel B——, a short, red-faced, genial man. The only other guests were the doctor : tall, stern-looking, and altogether much more military in his aspect than the colonel ; and the vicar, a pleasant fellow, who supplied the wit of the dinner, and the only one who abstained from theological talk. But in spite of the vicar our conversation incessantly turned with a bias in that direction ; so that we reached it before long, whatever topic we touched.

The Colonel laughed at the whole thing with his merry laugh, and quoted George Dawson : " I love religion and flowers ; but I hate botany and theology." But for all that he treated them very differently. He wore a flower always in his button-hole ; but was a very hypocrite in the matter of religion ; and though he visited all the old folks in the village, and did a world of good, he kept it buttoned up and hidden behind an appearance of the jauntiest indifference.

It was the doctor who, with long forefinger and outstretched neck, was looking down upon the vicar through a pair of tinted glasses. " Sin, as you call

it, sir, and all that kind of thing, is the result of example or contact. Like fevers and other mischiefs of that sort, it is spread by infection or contagion. Separate a man from these traditions and habits of evil and he will develop into a naturally religious animal, fulfilling the duties of life intelligently and as perfectly as any other creature. Take a lad born of parents that are of a good and healthy type; set him in healthy surroundings—and then let him alone. His religion will develop like his teeth and his biceps—of its own accord.”

“But where did the first sin come from, that infected the first sinner?” asked somebody. This question, however, was lost, as the doctor clenched at once his fist and his argument and drew back his long neck.

“I tell you, sir, sin is a matter of disease—a matter of overcrowding and ill-drainage. Healthy homes, cold water, pure air, good food—that is the real salvation of men.”

“Then I am thankful to have my responsibility so largely shared by the doctor, who is supposed to secure all this for us,” said the vicar.

“You remind me of a fellow who was brought before the magistrates at G—— the other day: an ill-looking man deeply pitted with small-pox, and whose character was notoriously bad. The magistrates looked at him doubtfully, shaking their heads while they heard the charge; and then the chairman asked him what he had to say for himself.

“ ‘Please, sir,’ said he, humbly touching his forelock, ‘I can’t see as it be any fault of mine. I was vaccinated when I was a chield, and I was christened; and if neither of them tookt, it weren’t *my* fault.’ ”

“Poor fellow!” said the Colonel, sadly.

“The impudent scoundrel!” said our host, who was a J.P., and sensitive as to his new dignity.

“Pre-cisely,” said the doctor, with a grape in his mouth.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next Sunday we went to the pretty little parish church, the host thinking it a duty to stand by the old landmarks and institutions of the country. “Besides,” he explained at the breakfast-table, “the vicar is very good—he never preaches more than a quarter of an hour.”

The colonel was there, of course, and as we rose up from the deep pew I saw at once the long neck and tall collar of the doctor.

The curate had read prayers, and now the vicar mounted the pulpit. The text was given out with the ordinary clerical intonation which everybody knows. But having been uttered—once only and very rapidly—the text was referred to no more until at the very end of the sermon, as if it were not the house but only a latch-key that let one in. It was taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes, the first chapter and ninth verse :

*"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."*

"It happened, dear brethren, that once upon a time the world had a fair chance of trying some important experiments in matters that concern us all very closely, and under conditions such as will probably never again be met with. The matters which to my own mind were so very decisively settled on that occasion are again asserting themselves with a pertinacity which is surprising.

"It has been said, and is indeed *being* said by not a few, and amongst them are men of intellect and culture, that sin is a disease—a disease inherited from vicious parents; or caught like fevers by infection; or, like other diseases, a thing that comes from foul houses and the lack of pure air and fresh water and good food. There certainly is, heaven knows and earth too, misery enough from hovels where families are huddled together in such a way that decency is impossible and filth is everywhere, and vice without any check is frightfully developed and encouraged."

(I fancied I saw the bald top of the doctor's head move slightly, as if he signalled his approval.)

"But, my brethren, if we turn to that experiment to which I have alluded, I am persuaded you will agree with me that no circumstance, no condition of being, is enough to account for sin. It lies deeper than any of these can reach."



I could tell that the doctor had drawn himself defiantly upright.

“Now in the case of which I speak, the parents were both physically and morally on a level with the best. Their descent, so far as they had one, was singularly free from any record of crime, and their constitution was perhaps unrivalled. Certainly the *gospel of health* never had so splendid an opportunity of testing itself. Neither father nor mother had suffered from any of those diseases of childhood which so often undermine the system. And the *gospel of circumstance* was equally favourable. They were not, on the one hand, vexed with harassing care and grinding poverty: nor, on the other hand, were they tempted by luxurious wealth or by great ambition. They belonged to that happy middle class, where toil, pleasant and light, filled up the day with freshness and left them nightly its blessing of refreshing sleep.

“Now to these happy parents there was born a son, as bright and beautiful as day, whom they received piously as a good gift from God, and sought with a wise and tender solicitude to train aright. And before he could become in any wise over-petted and spoiled as the only son, there came another child, as gentle and lovely a boy as ever lived. So they grew up together. And everything was full of promise for them both; for where could any harm come from? Contagion, infection, could not be, much less overcrowding, for they were a very long

way from the next-door neighbour ; and there was not so much as a servant who could instil into the young minds any knowledge of vice, or lower in any wise the lofty ideal of the father and mother. The only playmate and companion of this elder son was his brother, whose frank and fearless face beamed with honesty, and whose gentleness compelled the love of those about him.

“So they grew up to a noble manhood. As for fresh air there was nothing to defile it, and as for good food it was plentiful and cheap. House-room was abundant, and building sites went a-begging. No poverty goaded men into crime ; no rates oppressed the labourer, nor pauperized the receiver. They lived where public-houses were totally prohibited, and even the use of ardent spirits was unknown.

“And each of them had become a labourer in God’s world, and if *man* can find a gospel anywhere it is that same *gospel of true work*. In this, too, conditions were favourable, more favourable than most men can know in these times : for as new settlers in such a thinly-peopled country, they were their own lords, free alike from subservience and from vexatious obligations.”

(The vicar was a pronounced Liberal.)

“Such then were these two men. Living in the open air, watching the ways of nature and the work of God, exercising that dominion over the lower world which the Creator has given to man, yet not

as those who degrade and destroy, but as those who minister to it and lead it to further use and beauty. And having wrought within them by their work a patient hope and quiet faith, a lowly dependence upon God's bounty, and a crowning thankfulness—sweet graces which the din of cities scares away, bringing in their place a haughty independence and the hard suspicion of men towards one another, and greed, and keen advantage-taking.

"Together with all this yet another gospel was on its trial; and that also in circumstances more favourable than earth can ever know again. What is called the Gospel of *Art*—of *Æstheticism*."

(My host in the corner gave a sudden start, and I turned, thinking the subject had stirred his interest or his amusement. But he was fast asleep.)

"We are told that the want of the times is *beauty*. The freshness of the park, the garden, the field—these are to regenerate society. We must uplift the thoughts of men by the vision of fair things. We must stir their admiration and reverence by contact with graceful forms and glowing colours. Then craft and selfishness will be smitten through, and men will be drawn into gentleness and grace of speech and manner. To all of which I say *Amen* right heartily. God speed those who thus seek to bless their fellow-men, for it is a good and a godly work. But I fear, my brethren, that sin is deeper than all these can go. For I turn again to this early experiment. Here, about these two, beauty—

fresh, young, exquisite beauty rested upon all things. A sky bent over them that never had been defiled by city smoke. No demon engines made their din, no hideous manufactures spoiled the hill or valley, or poisoned the crystal stream or the pure air. No touch of man's disfigurement had come as yet upon anything about them. On all sides Nature met them in her most perfect loveliness, and all was sweet with the breath of flowers and glad with the song of birds.

"And now hear what came of it all. Here, though born of such parents, though brought up in such circumstances, his only company this quiet and gentle brother, his home amidst such beauty, freed alike from evil traditions and evil associations,—yet *that elder brother became a vagabond, an outcast, a murderer*—'CAIN ROSE UP AGAINST ABEL HIS BROTHER AND SLEW HIM.'"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Capital!" said the Colonel when we got to the church door, though before that he was rubbing his hands vigorously, and his face shone with a mischievous enjoyment—"Capital!"

"Bah!" growled the doctor; "it is not fair that these parsons never give us a chance of reply."

Our host only yawned and hurried onward, begging us not to be late for lunch.



## VIII.

### *THE FATHER'S LOVE AND THE CHILDREN'S BLESSEDNESS.*

“Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God : *and such we are.*”  
—I JOHN iii. 1.

I HAVE taken the text from the New Version, which gives us this very emphatic *Amen* : “And such we are.” Well may the Apostle cry *Behold!* as he sets forth this wonderful truth. It would do us good just to take the words one by one and linger over them, dwelling on their depths of meaning, getting their strength and sweetness into our souls. It is a comfortable thing to feel that whatever the sermon may be, here is a text that cannot fail to do us all good. I would that we might so listen to it that the music shall haunt us all through the week, breathing comfort and strength and joy. Let us remember that whilst we speak it only to the ear, there is with us One who came to shed this love abroad in the heart—to make it real and personal and *possessed*. Let us ask and claim His Presence.

We will look first *at the love of the Father*, and then *at the blessedness of the children*.

See, then, *whence this love comes*. Behold what manner of love *the Father* hath bestowed upon us. Wherever men learned the dreadful lie that God hates us, or that He is far away and unconcerned about us, certainly it is not to be found in the writings of the Apostle John. Here is no single passage that can be twisted or tortured into any such notion. Nowhere is the great love of God set forth more constantly and gloriously than it is here. He it is who records those precious words of the Lord Jesus Christ—words that none but the Lord from heaven could ever have spoken—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Up out of that truth grows this epistle; up out of that great root-truth grows all the Christian life. *God is love—He that loveth not knoweth not God*—this is the great foundation that the world wants, *the love of the Father*. Let men come to think that God is against them, and what can they do? There is nothing for it then but black and utter despair. Every man feels that at best he has a hard fight of it—with a heart that is prone to evil; a busy and subtle devil to tempt him; a hundred hindrances about him; a thousand harassing wants and fears. And if God be against him, there comes a sullen defiance that flings the reins on the neck of his passions and lets them gallop wherever they will; or else a sick despair, that just lets the wheels of Fate go over him and

grind him as they may. But if a man only believes through and through him that God *loves* him—that God wants to help him—then let winds blow, let earth tempt, let hell rage, that man can hope; he can rise up, and can come home; he is more than conqueror.

But it is not a truth to be heard only; and as if in dread that any should be content with hearing about it, the Apostle cries *Behold!* Wake up, dull heart, wake up with wonder at this great sight. The Almighty God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, about whom roll the million worlds that He has made, the Great Source and Sustainer of all things, He bends over us this day. He comes near to us; He throws about us the everlasting Arms; He lifts us up into His favour, and now as we accept the great love it is ours to cry, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God: and such we are." Believe in it: triumph in it. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.* This is the starting point. *We love Him because He first loved us. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

But saith some timid soul: Does it not say that God is angry with the wicked every day? True. How then can He love me? you ask. Well, it is because He loves that He is angry. If I were going on my way, and heard a set of boys rough and rude



and profane, I should feel sorry for them ; but if I saw my son amongst them I should feel not sorry only, but *angry*—angry not because I did not love him, but because I did. Believe it with all the heart. All this truth is the declaration of God's love. All the meaning of Christ's coming—of His life and death and resurrection and intercession—is the story of God's love to us. All the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit is to lead us into the assurance of His love. Jesus Christ the Son of God does not make the Father love us. Our own goodness, or our own relationship to Him, cannot create that love. *It is there* in the very nature of God. He is Love—for ever ; unchangeably ; and He loves *you*. Take it ; wrap it round you as a life-belt—your hope, your strength, your joy—the love which the Father hath bestowed upon *you*.

Let us draw near and look at the freeness and fulness of the love of God.

*It does not proceed from any need in the Divine Nature.* Gracious hearts have often been driven to adopt something to love. They must have something or some one to care for. We cannot think of Him who is love without any upon whom to bestow His love ; of One who is infinite love dwelling in the silence of the uncreated—the lonely One—the only One. Then should it be no wonder that we should be called the sons of God. Love could do nothing else. Necessity would compel such a nature to create something to satisfy His love. But in the

Eternal Father there never was any such need. That wonderful preface to the writings of St. John shows us the Only Begotten dwelling in the bosom of the Father. There is the eternal communion. There is love's satisfaction. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost in eternal communion and fellowship. So at the beginning of time we hear the decree from the Divine council, not of want, but of full, free, gracious love.—“Let us make man in our image and in our likeness.” Not to gratify any need of the Divine nature is it that we are thus uplifted. “*He hath loved, He hath loved us because He would love.*”

*This love of God is not mere pity.* It is not that the Almighty is moved by the needs and miseries of men and seeks to bring them into a more hopeful condition, just as the Samaritan of old, touched with tender pity by the sight of the man who had fallen among thieves, lifted him up and set him on his mule and provided for his wants. This manner of love is more, much more than pity. See, Pity stands in the porch, its eyes watching the poor wayfarer who comes wearied and footsore, ragged and perishing. And Pity bids the servant search if there is any scrap of meat and any cast-off clothing that can be spared. But look again, Pity stands and watches more intently; the face is changed; the tears gather; the man is stirred; he runs. In spite of rags and wretchedness, he falls upon the wanderer's neck. He kisses him and

presses him to his heart. The wondering servant comes forth with a crust or two of bread, and an old coat. No, indeed, that might do for pity, but this is *love*. "Bring out the best robes, and the ring for the finger and the shoes for the feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." That is *love*. Pity saw the wants, and would give what it could spare; but love saw the son, and could not give enough. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us—love that takes us for His very own; love that presses us to His heart: love that would hold us in closest communion and tenderest relationship; love that saith: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God: and such we are.

*Behold what manner of love—It is a righteous love.* Whilst some would degrade the love of God into mere pity, there are some who would drag it yet lower. Love, the love of God, is a whole heaven above that easy-going kindheartedness which is always indolent and not unfrequently is the very embodiment of selfishness—a complacent good nature incapable of indignation. With such people all sin is either weakness or misfortune—never a thing horrible, loathsome, and utterly accursed. "We must make allowances, you know. We must hope for the

best ; everybody has his little weakness, of course," is their ready explanation. To such people all punishment is harsh, if not actually unjust. They think of forgiveness as the easiest and cheapest thing in the world. One is tempted to think that such weak and silly souls work more mischief than wicked people. Of all the surplus population that could be spared we should be disposed to put these first, these "lumps of silly goodness," as one has called them. Such natures are almost incapable of high and holy love ; love that suffers ; love that dies sooner than sin. Unholy love is lust.

*But what can righteous love do with us ?* It finds us in all the guilt of our sin. It may yearn to deliver and to restore, but there is one thing it can never do—never, never, never—*it cannot pass by sin*. It can never make light of that. And who of us could trust God's love if He did ? There would be a suspicion, a fear, almost a scorn of it. We should feel that right through the throne of the universe there was a crack, and that some day all things would crash over into black and utter ruin. No, that is not the manner of His love. He brings it out, all out into the light, and in the face of heaven and earth and hell God passes sentence upon sin. Then He Himself stoops to bear its sentence ; to meet its dreadful penalty. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, that He laid down His life for us*. And now there meets us *love that is righteous*, and therefore free and full. Love that has nothing to

conceal ; nothing to be afraid of. Between us and our Father there rose that terrible fact—*I have sinned*. It shut us in like a prison wall. It held us as with fetters of brass. But lo ! He bare our sins in His own body on the tree. Now, fling back the bolts, off with the fetters. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God : and so we are.

Another light falls on the text if we turn it round and think of the children—*that we should be called the children of God*.

Adoption has much in it that is beautiful and very gracious. Nowhere more beautiful or more gracious than when Pharaoh's daughter with her attendants came by the waters of the Nile ; and there, amidst quivering reed and nodding bulrush, in the lapping of the wave, she found the strangely-fashioned cradle ; and lo, carefully folded within it lay the sleeping child. Then, startled by the sudden light, it woke, and looked forth with wondering eyes upon the many faces that crowded over it, and cried. The tenderness of the womanly heart was stirred ; so fair a child, so helpless ; and she took it into her arms, and said : " It shall be my child ; " and he became her son.

But yet adoption must always be *incomplete*. Moses was *called* the son of Pharaoh's daughter—that was all. It was only in name, and never of nature. The fondest love, the most careful training

in the Egyptian manners and learning, could not make him other than one of the Hebrews' children. But ours is not an adoption; we are His by regeneration. It is not a new name, but a new nature which is bestowed upon us. Begotten of God, we are His children indeed and of a truth. Do not explain it away as a figure. *And so we are.* Bound to the heart of the Father by the closest bonds and by the tenderest ties of relationship. Wonder at it, but do not doubt it. Claim it, in all its fullest privilege and blessing. *Now are we the children of God.* Take it word by word and speak it over to your heart. Read the words in the light of the cross of Christ; dwell upon them, asking and claiming the power of the Holy Ghost that He may make them a glorious and living reality.

*The children of God.* Ah, how foolish and wicked are our doubts of God's great love to us! Let us look into the family. Here is one in the mother's arms—the babe of some few months. See how it lies and laughs in the mother's arms, and how the mother bends over it with tenderest care and a great gladness. And there, sitting playing with some simple toy, is another, as happy as she can be—a little maiden of some three or four summers. And yonder by the fire is the sick one, with flushed cheek and heavy head, and the father comes and takes her on his knee; and speaks tenderly to her and soothes her comfortably. And busily moves the eldest daughter about the house, seeing to a

score of things and singing a sweet song. And home from the day's work comes the eldest son, big and broad and strong. Look at it. There is nothing wonderful in all that, except indeed that it is so common as not to be wonderful, for earth has no lovelier sight than a happy home.

But lo, the door opens, and into the place comes a monster vast and shadowy, a monster like a cloud that blots out heaven. He fills the house with gloom. See, he takes the little babe from the mother's arms, and sets it outside the door in the cold. "You lie there!" cries the monster. "What presumption for you to think that anybody is going to love you, a little, foolish, helpless thing like you are! Lie there till you are twenty-one, and then when you are big and strong you may be bold to talk of father and mother. Then there may be something in you worth loving." Then the monster angrily picks up the little one of three. "What do you know?" he cries. "Nothing, sir," replies the frightened child. "Do you understand all about the bonds of parental affection and the responsibilities of the filial relationship? And yet you venture to talk about father and mother. Run away to school and learn something, and when you are wise enough and can understand all these things, then you may think that your father and mother really care for you." He comes near to the little one that is ill and makes short work of her: "You talk about father and mother, a poor, dull, drooping



thing like you. No, no! Away with you! When you feel bright and happy, and fill the house with sunshine, there may be some hope for you; but who should care for a dull and stupid thing like you?"

Do you know that cruel monster? He is here to-day in our very midst. There are many here whom he has thrust out in the cold because they are little and weak. There are others whom he has often frightened and driven away because they cannot understand great mysteries. He has often terrified others because they have felt dull and heavy and sad. How cruel a tyrant is this Unbelief!

Thank God we feel how gloriously impossible it is that any mother can withhold her love from her baby because it is little and weak. For that very reason her love shall be more tender and more watchful. It is utterly absurd to talk as if the father should wait until his child is clever and wise, or till the sick one is bright and strong and well, before it can be cared for. It is blasphemy against love to think of such a thing. The hope of the little one ever growing big and clever and strong is to rest in that love, and to claim it as its own.

In the name of God's great love laugh aloud at this grim giant. Defy him. Not because they are great, or wise, or useful, or clever, or strong does God bend over His children and hold them dear; but because Love saith of them, *They are Mine.*

Speak it to yourself. Speak it until all the soul ring with the music of it. "BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE FATHER HATH BESTOWED UPON US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED THE SONS OF GOD: AND SUCH WE ARE."



## IX.

### *A TALK ABOUT TEMPTATION.*

GENESIS iii.

SO Paradise had a tempter in it. Then, one thing is quite certain—get where we may in this world, we cannot get beyond temptation.

Now, what are you going to make of that? Do you wonder at it? Do you wish that it had been otherwise? Do you think that life would have been a great deal better if there had been no possibility of evil?

No indeed; *the power to sin* is our greatest possession; it constitutes our majesty and glory. Accursed, indeed, is the power *of* sin, but without the power *to* sin we never could have been men. It is the infinite trust of God. In this power of will, this power to choose, God has divided unto us His living.

Certainly we might have been made without any will, blindly obeying instinct, an animated machine. Then we should never have fallen. But as certain is it, *that then we could never have risen*. Or we might have been placed in circumstances where the

will could never have exerted itself; where no temptation could have met us. Then, again, we could not have fallen; and then, again, we could not have risen. Innocence is not a virtue until it has had temptation and opportunity to sin; then innocence is strengthened by resistance, and exalted by victory into virtue. You cannot separate them—height implies depth, and the power to rise implies the power to fall. Earth stands midway betwixt heaven and hell; the only way *upward* is by temptation overcome; the only way *downward* is by temptation yielded to.

So, then, there are two ways of looking at the matter. A man may fret, and sigh, and talk rebelliously about his temptations and trials—then has he fallen without any tempter, and his own foolishness and fear are his undoing. Or a man may gird himself for the fight and say, “This is my opportunity for growth, for victory.”

Everywhere and in everything it is a poor, languid, sickly kind of life which knows no resistance; a flabby thing, not worthy of the name of a man, is he who has never had a chance of overcoming. Temptation overcome is the way, the only way, to the very throne of God. Amongst the brave men of old there was a notion that when one conquered an enemy the strength of the enemy went into the conqueror, and he became so much stronger by every conquest, and thus went on from strength to strength. It is thus that God grows His heroes, by *overcoming*.

If there were no temptation, there could be no resolute decision ; if there is no opportunity for sin, there is no opportunity for victory. If we will count the devil our greatest enemy, we may make him render us a true service. His hindrances overcome are our triumphs, and his temptations triumphed over are our crown and joy.

*Is not this the great law of all success?* A young man comes to London for business or for study. He does not expect to get on without any struggle. He knows that if he would succeed he must be watchful, hard-working, ready to resist and to overcome. If he is worth his salt he rejoices in real difficulties rightly dealt with ; in real hard work to be done. It knits the muscle of his character ; it develops in him courage, resoluteness, heroism. And is it only in religion that a man is going to whine and fret and tamely give in because a serpent hisses? Never! For such a glorious Lord, with so Almighty a Helper, for such a high destiny and calling as ours, let us gird ourselves in the face of the foe—more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

Again, there was a serpent in Paradise—one. *But there are a great many in the wilderness outside—* fiery flying serpents! And if I am going to meet the serpent at all, I would rather meet him in the Paradise of God, with God to help me, than meet him alone in the desert. Do not believe that it is

only in God's service that a man is exposed to temptation. Every day I live, and the more I know of the sorrows of life in the secrets of those about me, the more I am persuaded that it is a harder thing for a man to get to hell than to get to heaven. The love of God, which is the mightiest force in the universe, has to be met, and resisted, and overcome at every step and turn, if men will go downwards. I am not thinking of those who are surrounded by an atmosphere of prayer, and who have to leap over the wall of home restraints, and to loose themselves from the hold of holy examples ; I am thinking of those that crowd the public-houses and the places of amusement. How much it costs them of money, and time, and trouble, and suffering—how much they have to endure in the service of their cruel master ; and for what wretched wages ! Here is some honest and true-hearted working-man, who turns homeward with his week's earnings to a decent house, to the thrifty wife and happy children ; and as he goes some idle fellow flings a sneer at him. " Ah," you say, " how many troubles and trials are there in the way to heaven ! "

Well, follow the other man into the public-house. I hear the coarse, foul language ; there is the drunken brawl ; I see the rags, the bleared and bruised face ; I see a hovel stripped bare of everything but want and filth ; I see the wretched wife, the hungry and miserable children ; the terror that this man brings with him ; the oaths, the blows, the misery, the

want, the lost character, the heaped-up curse of it all—*How many devils are these?*

Surely, the first man is much better off with a paradise of a home and only a serpent to hiss at him occasionally—for by God's grace it can *only* hiss. If it bites me that is my fault.

So then all men know the devil on one side or the other. On the *resisting* side they know him as a tempter only; but on the other side, the *yielding* side, they know him as infinitely more than that—as the cruel tyrant, the bitterly hard master, Apollyon the Destroyer. To-day the saddest people in the world, the hardest worked, who spend most and earn least, who find life an awful weariness, are those who have let the tempter lead them furthest by his promises of pleasure. It is true, there is one serpent in the garden of God—but there are a great many outside.

Learn the lesson of his devices. *Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field.* Subtlety is his stock-in-trade. He is a doctor in philosophy, a master in logic; and if he were subtle and skilful at the first, how much more so to-day, when for six thousand years he has been diligently practising his art and perfecting it? Whenever any course wants a very clever man to defend it, be quite sure *that* is not the path for you. The way of God is a narrow way, but it is not a crooked way, nor is it a by-path; it is a *highway*. Look



at the heroes of the Bible who have overcome in the most desperate onslaughts of hell. Their words have not been arguments, but sharp, clear, defiant utterances that ring like the blast of a trumpet: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" "Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy god, nor will we worship the image that thou hast set up." "Whether we ought to obey man rather than God, judge ye. We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard." The great Master Himself would not enter upon any controversy with the devil, but defended Himself with the short, sharp stroke of the Word. There is nothing that baffles the devil more than simple, straightforward honesty. Of old time we read of one who set fire to the enemy's ships by reflecting upon them the rays of the sun. It is the secret of our victory over Satan—*walk in the light*. The Lord Jesus Christ has given us a precept which no time ever needed more than our own—"Let your communication be yea, yea, nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Take no course that will not admit of a good, downright, honest *yes* or *no*. The Tempter is a master of logic; he can play the game with splendid skill, and is sure to beat you at it. He can prove that though twice two make four in the case of everybody that ever lived, yet your case is so peculiar, your position is so altogether exceptional, that *this once*, at any rate, it is perfectly certain, beyond any manner of doubt, that *twice two*

*are five.* There are a few very old-fashioned people who would deny it—your great-grandfather, for instance, in his benighted times, believed that two and two made four—but, really, what is the use of life if one is not going to advance upon his poor notion of things? And then there is such-an-one, and so-and-so, they quite think that in this case it really comes to five; and you would not set yourself up to know better than they do. And your dear old mother? Well, she *was* a saint, *that* everybody must admit (the arrant knave! why, for fifty years he told her to her face that she was far too great a sinner to get to heaven!), but she really had very narrow and mistaken notions about some things—the theatres and the music-halls, for instance. So he talks. By this you may know him: whenever any course needs much argument and explanation to prove it innocent, turn away from it—walk in the light. If you play with him at logic he will beat you.

*Trace his subtlety in his methods.* He comes to the woman first; perhaps because she is less suspicious; possibly because she was less able to withstand his wiles; probably because he knew the best way to get the man was to get the woman.

He finds her alone. Good Matthew Henry, prince of commentators, suggests that if she had kept near to the side whence she was taken she might have been safe. Perhaps so; at any rate, I

know our only safety is in the presence of our dear Lord and Master, close to that precious side.

The Tempter finds her near to the tree, looking at it and desiring it ; so her eyes and her longing were on the side of the enemy. If we would keep free from the tempter, keep out of the way of temptation. Some do really tempt the Tempter to destroy them. If we are willing to go with evil company one step, why not the next ? and then, why not the whole way ? If we laugh at their foul jests, they well may claim us for their foul deeds. If a man puts his head into the very mouth of the old lion, do not let anybody wonder that it gets snapped off.

*The Tempter begins by questioning*—for he knows how innocently to begin—"So, is it true that God hath said that ye may not eat of every tree of the garden ? "

"We may eat of the trees of the garden," said Eve, "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden we may not eat, *lest we die.*"

*Lest we die.* God had said, *Ye shall surely die.* Here was the loose opening of the joints of the armour. If the woman had set the "*thou shalt*" of God against the "*thou shalt not*" of the Tempter, it had been her safety and deliverance. This is ever our defence. "His Truth," says the psalmist, "is thy shield and buckler." This is our weapon, against which no foe can prevail. The great law of God admits of no argument ; it is supreme, unalterable, eternal. See how the Lord Jesus Christ took

His stand upon this fortress of God's commandment, clad from head to foot in this heavenly suit of mail, through which no fiery dart of the Wicked One could pierce—"IT IS WRITTEN, THOU SHALT;" "IT IS WRITTEN, THOU SHALT NOT." The absolute surrender of ourselves to God for an utter obedience is our perfect safety. But to loosen the authority of the law is to fall an easy prey to the Adversary. It is to come forth from our stronghold and to stand unarmed and helpless, face to face with the old Lion.

*For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* There are many things about this cruel Deceiver that rouse our indignation, but I can think of nothing more hateful than this, that he should dare to be the libeller of our gracious and loving Father in heaven, and that he should pose as a philanthropist, the friend and benefactor of the race!

"I really am quite concerned about you," he seems to say, "to see such gifted and noble creatures as you are kept out from your true position and sacred rights!" Here, indeed, it is hard to follow the example of the archangel Michael, and to bring no railing accusation against Satan when *he* comes to free men from superstition, which is his name for religion; from bondage, which is his name for duty; from tyranny, which is his name for law. He has many forms and disguises, but none is more

loathsome than this, that *he* should pass himself off as the princely benefactor of the race, the anxious and devoted champion of men's rights, the brave defender of their liberties !

See how Eve might have reasoned if only she had kept in mind the goodness of God. "What, then, hast thou done for us, sir, since thou art so concerned for our welfare ? Where are the tokens and proofs of thine eagerness to serve us ? He Who said, 'Thou shalt not eat of this tree,' hath made this fair earth and all that is therein. He planted this Paradise and hath given us all things richly to enjoy. Canst thou be more generous, more gracious than He ? Against thy single word, behold, He sets ten thousand glorious assurances of His regard. If thou, indeed, wert seeking our good, wouldst thou beget these doubts of Him whom we have found all love, and who hath so perfect a claim upon us ?"

This completes our safety, when to our utter obedience to His law there is added this abiding confidence in His love.



## X.

### COURAGE.

“Add to your faith virtue.”—2 PETER i. 5.

THIS word *virtue* has lost the meaning that anciently belonged to it. Time was when it called up visions of a hardy endurance and heroic bravery ; there was a power in it that stirred men’s hearts like the sound of a trumpet. It meant courage—valour—force. The very mention of it suggested the plumed helmet, the dented shield, the trusty sword. It brought to mind the veteran, his shaggy eyebrows knit with stern resoluteness ; a face where many a desperate encounter had left its scar ; whose memory was all hung about with battle-scenes and furious frays. That *was* virtue. To the early readers of this epistle, who gathered in some upper room surrounded by perils, it brought to mind the story of some maiden martyr, thrust into the arena, greeted by the thousands of onlookers, waiting with a placid courage for the beast of prey whose impatient thunder rang through the place. Above all it brought to mind the glorious memory of the great Captain of our salvation—earth’s very bravest Knight—who

saw on before Him the gathering darkness, the rugged hill, the dreadful Cross ; yet day by day and step by step, all unhastening as all unhindered, came on doing the will of His Father in heaven. That *was* virtue.

To-day it means rather the gentle temper than the brave soul. Virtue suggests goodness, purity, truth. Now whilst we set the utmost value upon that white-handed gentleness, yet we may well wish for the stern courage and the valour that belonged of old to this word.

The change of meaning in the word indicates the changed estimate and notion of the Christian religion itself. Whatever the Christian was in the early days, he could not well be a coward. He could not live in any fear as to what people would say about him :—there was no doubt about that. And he could not live with a miserable counting of the loss or gain that religion should bring him. He knew full well that it would mean abuse, loss, danger, perhaps death. So in the old time Christianity first demanded *faith* that took hold of the promises—and then demanded *courage* that held on to them at any risk though earth and hell raged furiously.

To-day religion is not so much a battlefield as it is a hospital for sick and disabled folks ; it is very often only a round of poultices and plasters and nourishing diet, where the talk is of troubles and trials and what we have to go through. I have met Religion looking very unlike the warrior or the



maiden martyr. A poor thing, coughing a feeble apology for its existence, and timidly promising not to get into anybody's way if we will only let it alone ; that shuts its eyes for fear of seeing what is wrong, and holds its tongue for fear of giving offence ; a poor, sick, sighing thing that can do nothing in the world but sit by the fire nursing itself, creeping very occasionally into the sunshine when the wind is not in the east. There is much need that we add to our faith virtue ; that we keep alive this spirit of daring—fearless, outspoken, determined. We need a religion that is a thorough nuisance to those who want to do wrong ; with an eye like an eagle's for anything that is not straight, and making a hideous noise about it such as will set the Pharisees grumbling indignantly. A courage that can die, but cannot be put down ; that can be laughed at and starved if need be, but cannot do other than the right and cannot speak other than the truth. There is much faith to-day, but we want this courage to go right out to live and dare and endure—in one word, we want a *great enthusiasm for Jesus Christ*.

LOOK AT THE COMPANY IN WHICH THIS VALOUR IS FOUND. *Add to your faith valour.* St. Peter is writing to those who have obtained like precious faith in the Saviour. But it is not good for Faith to be alone. Faith is the Queen, and alike her authority, her dignity, and her safety demand that she should have her bodyguard and following. For Faith is not

to live in luxurious ease ; hers is a high and sacred calling. So is it that at her right hand must stand the tall and stalwart captain of her guard, *Courage*, my Lord *Courage*, strong in action, resolute in danger, fearless always. And at her left is her Prime Minister and councillor, old *Knowledge*, with lofty brow, and ready understanding of the times and its requirements, and skilful in devices for meeting them. Then comes the Comptroller of the Household, a goodly gentleman of clear eye and of fair complexion, my Lord *Temperance*. But do not think that he has only to do with the wine-cellar ; he sees to all the expenditure of the household. Then cometh the Lady-in-Waiting, *Patience*, fair *Patience*, whose cheery song keepeth the palace bright in troublous times. "Bear bravely," *Patience* sings "it is all well that cometh down from Him ; and it is ever well for them that journey up to Him." Then cometh the Queen's chaplain, *Godliness*, who moveth amidst the rest having a deep and holy sense of God's claim, a steadfast eye to His commandments, a lofty sense of His greatness, and a glad obedience to His will.

Then come the two almoners who dispense the Queen's bounty—*Brotherly Kindness* and *Charity*. *Brotherly Kindness* careth for those that are of the household of Faith, but his lady, the sweet sister *Charity*, goeth outside, and saith that all are to be loved for Christ's dear sake.

Thus only is Faith secure, and thus only can she

rightly discharge all her duties and claim all her honours, when she is attended by each of these. Take the list and go through it carefully day by day—a matter for our meditation ; a kindling for our desires ; and a subject for our prayers. He who gave us faith will give us all the gifts we need to secure and satisfy Faith.

*That Christ's religion asks for courage should give it a stronger claim upon us.*

Once in Northern India a detachment of soldiers were led against a band of robbers who had intrenched themselves in a strong position at the head of a narrow gorge. The troops were marching along the valley between the steep sides, when a sergeant and eleven men separated from the rest by taking the wrong side of the ravine. The officer in command signalled them to return. They, however, mistook the signal for a command to charge. For a moment they looked up the rocky heights, and saw their enemies above the ramparts. Then with a ringing cheer they clambered up the steep side. At the top were seventy robbers sheltered behind a breastwork. It was a desperate encounter, but against such odds it could not last long. Six fell on the spot—the rest were hurled backward into the depths below.

Now it was a custom in that nation when any of their bravest fell in battle to distinguish the most valiant by a thread tied round the wrist—a thread of

red or green silk, red denoting the greatest courage. Some little time afterwards the English troops found the twelve bodies stark and gashed, but round the wrist of each was tied the scarlet thread—the distinction of the hero.)

(So even amongst a wild and savage robber horde bravery, the bravery of an enemy, is a thing to be revered and honoured. I ask you to-day to come and pledge yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, *because it does need courage*. Not because it means peace, but because it means a fight, a brave endurance, a lofty courage. I do pray you, because it is a high and noble call to a valiant life, this day kneel and pledge yourself to Jesus Christ, in His strength, in everything and everywhere to be His faithful soldier and servant—seeking first of all and always the glory of the King.

*With many is it not just this one thing—the lack of courage—which is the undoing of the life?*

Some want courage *to decide for Christ*. They are like the spies when they came back from the land of Canaan, who had seen the great clusters of grapes and the pomegranates and the figs, and who cried, “It is a goodly land, and surely it floweth with milk and honey. But the people are strong who dwell in the land, and the cities are walled up to heaven. Moreover, the sons of Anak are there.” Thus is it that many stand to-day. They have looked into the goodly land, the land of God’s favour; the land of

promise. Its beauty has spread before them, and they have seen its fruits. Their longings often go across the border. "It is a goodly land," they say, "but——" and there they stop, thinking about the sons of Anak and the cities walled up to heaven. And so month after month goes by, it may be year after year, whilst they stand looking, desiring, hoping, and yet never going.

There are not many things that men are more ashamed of than cowardice—yet what is this? Everything within you urging you to be wholly the Lord's—conviction and desire,—and yet lacking the courage to step out and claim it as your own. This is all that is wanting—the courage to come right out and say, "By God's help I will be His soldier and servant." You may try to soften it and colour it a little bit down in your own heart, but it is lack of courage and nothing else. "Well," you say, "supposing it is so, how can I get the courage?" Where others have got it, my brother. Come to the great Captain of our salvation; He can make us more than conquerors.

*Again—in these busy times many a man wants courage to deal with circumstances that hinder him.*

A man may easily come to find himself in a position where multiplied cares drive him in a perpetual whirl until anything like a quiet communion with God is a thing almost impossible. The hurried thought, the restless feeling, haunt one even in one's dreams. Such remember times when, as to Isaac,

there came an eventide in which they could go forth to meditate. Care sank to rest with the sun, and heaven stole over the soul with the stars, and as of old God walked and talked with His child in the cool of the day. But our busy life, like the great cities, has no eventide. We keep alive the day and hide from heaven. The freshness of our love to Christ is gone; the hand of faith hangs withered at the side. The vision of God is faint and dimmed; and, like a dead tree, the form remains only because of the life that used to be.

"Well," says somebody, indignantly, "must I sacrifice my business?" Yes; or anything else, if you can dare to call it a sacrifice, seeing what infinite gain is at stake. Remember those terrible words of the Lord Jesus Christ: "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell." Be quite sure of this—the only possible way in which you can keep up an earnest, steadfast life in the soul is to get a clear half-hour alone with God at the beginning of the day—a devout meditation on the Word, not read only, but getting into the heart of it, and getting it into the heart; and then tarrying in the presence of God until the soul rests in Him, and there is the clear vision of the King. Nothing can possibly take the place of that. Secure it at any sacrifice. To your faith add courage.

*Others need courage to deal with damaging influences about them.* There is some companion, or some pursuit, or some pleasure that takes away all the

heart and appetite for the service of the Lord Jesus. It leaves you like a garden in winter—nipped, withered, dead, without bud or bloom or beauty. There are things that make prayer such hard work that it seems impossible, and the Bible is a weariness, and the service of God is a dreary restraint. It may be that the world does not call these things sins. Perhaps even the Church thinks that there is no harm in them. But whatever they are to others, to you they are hindrances and injuries. The world may call them grapes, but they have pricked you as thistles; the world may count them figs, but they have poisoned you as thorns. Add to your faith courage. Resolve by God's help to have done with them bravely for the sake of the King, and for the sake of your own true life.

*There are others still who need courage to deal resolutely with besetting sins.* There are those who know of sins which have ensnared them and threatened to be their eternal ruin. They have struggled from their grasp sorely wounded and almost slain. And yet they trifle with them, they dally and play with them. What dreadful madness is this! Your only hope is to add to your faith courage—to have no terms with the enemy. You must perish or your foe; the two cannot live together. Doubt means destruction. What others can do without peril means death to you. In the name of God and in His strength rise up resolutely and defiantly, and resolve to get as far as possible from the threatening



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evil. To-day gird yourself. Take hold of the strength of Christ. It needs only a single resolute blow, and the victory is assured. Now in Christ resolve that you will be the conqueror, or you will find that the temptation will meet you day by day, hour by hour, in new forms, persistent, subtle, incessant. Make the mighty Saviour your strength. Do not venture out of His presence. You are safe only in His shadow ; strong only when holding His hand. By all the sense of your need, by all the awful peril that besets you, keep close to His side. Do not venture forth into any day without a sure grip of His hand and a whole-hearted reliance upon His help. To faith add courage.



## XI.

### *THE SOURCES OF COURAGE.*

“The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.”—DANIEL xi. 32.

WHAT is called courage is sometimes a blind folly that cannot see the danger, or a lack of sense to see it as it is. Or it is a mere love of encounter, of distinction, or of destroying. You have the picture of it in Job (xxxix. 19-25), where the war-horse is described. “Hast thou given the horse strength? Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? Canst thou make him afraid as a grasshopper? The glory of his nostrils is terrible; he paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength; he goeth on to meet the armed men; he mocketh at fear and is not affrighted, neither turneth he back from the sword; the quiver rattleth against him, the glittering spear and the shield; he swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage, neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet; he saith amongst the trumpets, Ha, ha! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting.” Very fine. It is the courage of the man who leaps

into the rapids and fights desperately with whirlpool and currents and huge waves, in order to show his skill and strength. Yes, that is courage, but a thing to be checked as much as to be cheered, as much a mischief as a virtue, and it is perhaps hard to say to which it most inclines.

But there on the bank of the rushing river goes some sober citizen who would never play the fool in any such fashion as that, and would most likely send the man who did it to prison for a week to cool his head a little. Suddenly there is a shriek—a child goes drifting downward—somebody's child, and in an instant the man is ready to plunge in. Yet another shriek—and he hears, he sees, it is *his own child*, and he has leapt into the boiling surge—anything to rescue the little one—ready to die if it shall be saved. The sublimest courage, the loftiest heroism is an inspiration. How can you measure the courage? By the measure of the love. Tell me how much he loved the child, and I can tell you how much courage he had. That highest courage is sacred to love. Nothing but love can kindle it. They seem to run into one another. A definition of courage may be this: The life held for another's good. We define love. What is it? The life held for another's good comes in there too.

And this is Christianity—its source, its strength, its life, its all, is love. Everything that can create and sustain the truest love is found in the religion of Jesus Christ, and there only. In the person of

Christ, in the life and death of Christ, in the teaching and revelation of Christ, in all that Christ was and is and is to be, there is all that can create and satisfy the utmost love of which we are capable.

Do you ask why it is, then, that we have so many so-called Christians who do not exhibit much love, or courage either, but are just as selfish and fearful as other people? Because we have come to make religion an appeal to selfishness, instead of appealing to the generous appreciation of that which is love-worthy. It is a poor little goodness that is bought by a bribe of sweetmeats, and not from any love of the mother and any delight in pleasing; and the goodness that is good because it will be whipped if it is not good is perhaps a more shallow goodness still. That is the goodness we grow by appeals to selfishness, and we call it Christianity. If we were only as great as God is, *we* should arrange the stars in alarming texts; *we* should preach in earthquakes and volcanoes and thunderstorms and plagues of Egypt; and *we* should make all the members of the Church very prosperous in business and very happy! But God comes down from heaven to meet us as the Holy Child of Bethlehem; as the Blessed Friend and Brother of men; as the lonely Wanderer in the wilderness; as the Sufferer, misunderstood and rejected; as the crucified Redeemer; as the risen Lord seeking to abide with us. Christ has come by His own great love to make us all true men. They

that do *know their God* shall do exploits. This is the source of courage, as it is the source of love; and more—this is life eternal, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent.

Let us think of the different motives that prompt men to endurance and valour, and see how they meet in Jesus Christ our Lord. To begin on the lowest ground--

*I can think that soldiers find some courage in the greatness of their nation, they have a pride in the vastness of the dominion.*

Ah! what king can vie with our King? What are all the kings of the earth together beside Him? Do we estimate their power by the extent of their realm? The earth is our Lord's and the fulness thereof; the sea is His and He made it. He sitteth in the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing before Him; His are all the million worlds that roll about us, "the star dust of His feet." How will you estimate a monarch's greatness? By the number of his subjects? By the wealth of the nation? By the armed men he can bring into the field, and by the ships of battle? O, how do all these proud hosts sink into an utter nothingness beside our King, the King of Glory!—the great Creator of heaven and earth, Who out of nothing called the worlds; Whose breath is the life of all, Who satisfieth the desire of every living thing, Whose power is infinite—the Lord of heaven and earth and hell, Who holdeth the sea in the hollow of

His hand, and the wind in His fists. Well may the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

*Does the antiquity of the kingdom add to the stateliness and renown?* A mockery, surely; for are not the ancient kings all in the dust? They sleep, and leave but empty names on gilded tombs. But our King—"before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God." With such a King and Captain, who dare be afraid? My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. By the majesty and might of the Most High, add to your faith valour.

*Think again of the blessedness of His sway.* Men go forth and do great deeds of valour—for what? To possess themselves of other people's territory, to push their commerce, often degrading and destroying the nations with drink and diseases. Or they go forth risking their lives to rectify a frontier or to avenge some hasty word with blood. Shall we not find our enthusiasm kindled by the blessedness and beneficence of His great purposes? He is come to seek and to save that which was lost. He is come to rescue captive souls and to destroy the works of the devil—to deliver the drunkard, to cast out lust and pride, to befriend the poor and needy. He is come to purify and sweeten the cities of the earth, and to make glad the homes of the people. For such an One, and for enterprises like these, shall we not catch the spirit of Him whose right hand doeth valiantly?

*Think, too, of the victories He hath won.* Do men find courage at the thought of the names that are blazoned on their standards? How, then, ought our hearts to beat and our spirits rise when we think of the triumph of our blessed Lord and Master Jesus Christ! Time would fail us to glance at the splendid victories which He hath won. Think for a moment how beneath His influence woman, who at His coming was a slave or a plaything, has become ennobled, and men instinctively bring her their ready tenderness and courtesy and service. Think how the working man, who at Christ's coming was a slave, by the Divine Working Man has had toil dignified and himself uplifted and honoured. Think how the little children were regularly exposed, either left to perish, or else were picked up and saved alive to be sold as slaves, or for the most miserable purposes of lust. And by the power of the Holy Child Jesus the little child has been made sacred.

And now we are in the ranks, followers of this same glorious Lord. O, lift up your head; walk with firm step. Better not be His at all than be His without a courage worthy of His greatness and renown.

But above all, *do men find courage in Him Whom they serve? Is the Spirit of the Leader able to kindle enthusiastic devotion and daring unto death?* Then how shall we speak of our glorious Lord and Saviour? I do wonder with shame and grief at



myself that I can know Him at all, and yet ever be half-hearted in His service ; that we can call Him Lord without finding an enthusiasm that fills and fires the whole heart. Think of Him, our glorious Emmanuel, fairer than the sons of men, the Holy One, of such high majesty, yet what gracious tenderness, what condescension ! King of kings, yet is He the meek and lowly in heart. Other kings have sometimes fired the love of the people by sharing their hardships. Alexander made his followers ready to die for him by walking in their long marches that some wearied one might ride, and by refusing a draught of water that some sick soldier might have his share. But our King and Captain—ah, was there ever such an one as He ! He was rich, and for our sakes became poor ; for us He made Himself of no reputation, and humbled Himself to death, even the death of the Cross, for our deliverance. Cyrus gained the affection of his soldiers by tearing off strips from his robes with which to bind up their wounds. But our King gives Himself a ransom for us all ; the chastisement of our peace is upon Him, and *by His stripes we are healed*. For such a King and Captain shall we have a timid, faltering service ? It cannot be.

The followers and soldiers of Alexander and Cyrus were inspired by the *record* of these deeds ; here was one and there another to whom the actual kindness had been shown. Here was the man, the very man, who, footsore and wearied, had been

set upon the king's horse ; here was the very man who, wounded and fevered, drank at the king's hand the draught of water. And what of *them* ? Do you not think that *they* would claim to serve the king—to wait upon him, to be in his body guard, to minister to him, to follow him in the thickest of the fight, to fight for him where the spears were busiest and the arrows flew in showers ? Ah ! we have known not records only and traditions of His love, but we are *the very men* who have had the great gifts of His grace, the great tokens of His bounty. *He loved me and gave Himself for me.* And now—what ? O, surely our hearts cry out : “ My Lord, I must follow Thee most closely, I must cleave to Thy side. For Thee I claim the post of honour ; my life, my joy, my glory this—to serve Thee with all my heart and strength ! ”

For such an One as our King and Captain be very brave.



## XII.

### *THE GREAT SOURCE OF COURAGE.*

“Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.”—  
HEBREWS xii. 3.

WE have thought already of some sources of courage. Let us turn now to the Great Source of Courage—Jesus Christ Himself. The name by which He is here spoken of, the Author of our faith, is capable of a change that will make it much more suitable to our subject. Elsewhere in this epistle the same word is rendered *Captain*—the Captain of our salvation. And in the Acts of the Apostles the word is translated *Prince*—the Prince of Life. It is rather in this aspect that we would think of the Lord Jesus—not so much the Author of our faith as the Leader of the faithful, the Prince and Captain of all believers. Consider Him.

I can think of nothing that would be more interesting or helpful than to take this subject of courage and to trace it through the Scriptures—finding the texts that refer to it and the incidents that illustrate it. You will find that whenever God sought to

strengthen the courage of any man, and to qualify him for any special work, He always revealed *Himself* to that man. The first thing the man had to do was to *look up*—and that meant looking away from himself and from his circumstances. Now that is the first thing for us—to *look up*. We may look at ourselves and our weaknesses until we get so near-sighted that we can see nothing else; and we may think so much of them that we can think of nothing else. We may look at our difficulties and hindrances, numbering our foes and measuring them until we sink in despair. Or we can look up to our Great Captain—and then at once we rest in assured safety, and cry triumphantly: “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

*Consider Him.* Learn to look up. It is an exercise in which we have to be trained and drilled until we have mastered it. We want to make it the swift, instinctive, and defiant habit of the soul to consider in face of every difficulty—How much have I got in Jesus Christ my Lord? Unbelief gives a man a crick in the neck so that he cannot look up. But faith, like the eagle, sets her eyes on the sun and soars away until earth is lost in the mists below, and she lights on the highest mount of God. If we would have a life of singing and triumphant courage, we must get into this habit—the heavenly habit of *considering Jesus*.

*It was in this way that God made His heroes of old, by the revelation of Himself.* Abraham had come

up from his country, and from his kindred, led by the promise of becoming a great nation, in whom all the earth should be blessed. But the years go by, and as yet no child is born unto him. Then God brought him forth and made him look up, up into the great expanse of heaven where hung the host of stars, large and brilliant in that clear sky—all of them upheld by the hand of the Almighty, made by the breath of His mouth, ordered by His infinite wisdom. "Fear not, Abram, I AM thy Shield, and thy exceeding great Reward. Tell the stars if thou be able to number them. So shall thy seed be." And there came upon his soul a confidence as deep and calm and majestic as the heaven that arched him. *Abraham believed God, and it was counted to Him for righteousness.*

So it is again and again—for it is ever thus that God makes His heroes. See when Israel was enslaved in what seemed a hopeless bondage, and when Moses had fled from the court of Pharaoh in fear and despair. God met him in the desert, and revealed Himself: "I AM the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I have seen the affliction of My people, and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians." What then of Pharaoh and his men of war and the hosts of his chariots compared with the Presence of the great Jehovah? There was no room for fear when God had spoken.

Look, again, at Joshua. How the word rings

over and over again through that first chapter like the sound of a trumpet. *Be strong and of a good courage. Only be thou strong and very courageous. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.* And not with such words only is the heart of Joshua made strong. As he draws near to Jericho, the stronghold of the Canaanites, walled up to heaven, with men of valour whose stature and strength filled Israel with terror—in the stillness of the night suddenly appeared to Joshua one with his sword drawn. Instantly Joshua sprang up and cried, “Art thou for us or for our enemies?” And there came the answer, “Nay; but as the Captain of the Lord am I now come. See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.” And Joshua fell upon the ground and worshipped, and he knew that all the land was his. It is this revelation and vision of our Captain’s presence in which our assurance of victory lies.

Coming to later times, see how Christ greets and gladdens the company of His disciples before He gives them their great commission. *Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations. . . . And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*

And now to us, as to them, it is by this revelation

of Jesus Christ that we are to be made strong and very courageous. That presence is our victory. Like the great saints of old, for endurance and for conquest our strength is in beholding Him Who is invisible.

*Consider Him. This is everything.*

In the Christian life Christ Himself is the source and strength of all. A man is a Christian exactly as he receives Christ into his thought, and heart, and life. And this is the order, through the thought into the heart and thence into the life. Therefore, *consider Christ*—gather the thoughts in from other things, and set them upon Christ. In everything that we would get hold of thoroughly we must give our minds to it, as we say. And this means give your mind to Christ. Christ is to us what we will let Him be. “He could not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief.” “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” If I will let Him into my life, He will fill it with light and blessedness, as the sun fills the heavens. *Consider Him*—not the truth about Him. Lectures on botany are poor things to put in place of flowers. Sermons and teachings about Christ are poor things indeed to put in place of Him. It is more than ever needful in times like these, when life is such a rush and whirl, that we make room and leisure in our lives to cultivate this art of considering Christ. And if we do not cultivate it, we shall be very miserable specimens of religion,



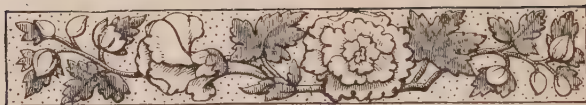
a discredit to our profession, with neither strength nor courage to meet our foes. To consider Him means leisure, opportunity, resoluteness—a shutting out of other things that we may be shut in with our Lord. Alas ! what hurried and passing glimpses of our great Master do content us ! There is a bit of the country—than which, I think, there is nothing more lovely in all England—that I have often passed through in the railway carriage ; eagerly I have looked out of the window, over the deep valleys, woods overhanging woods, going down to misty depths, and away to the moorland, stretching up to the rugged heights ; then suddenly a bank of earth has blotted it all out ; a narrow cutting has hemmed us in—and then the tunnel darkness. Out again and across some viaduct ; looking down on the clear stream amidst the boulders below, another glance of the hills,—and then a new obstruction. And some people call that “seeing the country.” How much can one *consider* it amid such vexatious glimpses ? But some fine day I have left the railway station and stepped out on to the moor, and in a few moments have stood amidst its stillness, the great unbroken stretch of earth and sky, the music of some little brook and the plover’s call not breaking the silence, only heightening it. Then I have gone up on to the granite height, and there under the blue heaven I have looked away, away on every side, over the miles of country, catching here and there the faint, silvery line of the sea. Then and

then only I *saw* it—thus I could *consider* it. We must get away alone up into the Mount of the Lord if we would consider Him. The busier you are the more you need it: this thinking about Him until He comes to reveal Himself. With many how would half an hour of such *considering* transform the life! How blessed is it to begin the day by counting up what we have got in Jesus Christ; by dwelling upon His goodness until the heart sings; by considering His power until we are girt with strength; to rise until we are in the presence of the King; and then to come forth into the day with a great sense of His love and care filling all the soul! He, my Lord and Captain, my Friend and Helper, my Deliverer and my God. Then do we come down from the mount like Moses of old, bathed in the light of God; and the busy steps do keep time to the sweet music of heaven. *Consider Him.*

*Consider Him as you read the Scriptures.* To very many this book is but a dull and even discouraging book. It must ever be so unless we learn to read it aright—only the old-fashioned story of a dead past; the record of people and things which have but a slight claim upon our regard; mysterious texts about which learned doctors have fought each other for centuries. But saith the Captain: "*These are they which testify of ME.*" When I consider Him—lo! it is another book; it is a well of water, a cool refreshing spring in the desert—then is it sweeter than honey: more to be desired than gold. Then is

it no dead Christ of long ago, but my Lord whose gracious voice greets me in its pages. Then in every promise is the declaration of a love that is all mine, and every manifestation of His power is a rest and gain for me. Then every word of wisdom reveals to me a new glory in my Lord, and every word adds to my wealth of blessedness in Him. Consider Him, until the weakness and the fear be lost, and we see no man save Jesus only. Do not for a moment let my words discourage you. If He Himself have declared that these are they which testify of Him, be sure that He waits thus to reveal Himself. There is but one condition—Search the Scriptures; consider Him.

Again, *in prayer consider Him*. What a poor, empty, and all unmeaning thing we may make of prayer—a round of phrases without any force to send them heavenward; a set of pious aspirations without any wings, without desire or expectation, muttered like a charm! But *consider Him*—the great gift of the Father's love—and then with what boldness can I ask! Consider Him, and what He desires to do for us, and then we can pray. Like the woman of old, when I see Him I fall down at His feet and tell Him all. When we consider Him and His love, the soul finds its wings, and praise takes the place of prayer, and it soars upward, with want and fear and self forgotten, like the lark that rises singing till it is lost in the light. *Consider Him!*



### XIII.

#### *THE HEROISM OF JESUS CHRIST.*

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.”—HEBREWS xii. 2.

LET us again turn to consider the great Leader and Captain of the faithful, remembering that He is not an example only, not only inspiring us with the courage which comes from admiration and devotion, but very much more than that—coming to be in us, to repeat in us and through us His victories. Christ’s most glorious conquests are the manifestation and the measure of a Power that is available for us in our every-day life.

Let us consider the heroism of Jesus Christ: *He endured the Cross, despising the shame*; and the motive which inspired Him: *for the joy that was set before Him.*

I. *The Heroism of Jesus Christ.*—Naturally and irresistibly our thoughts pass to the scene of the Crucifixion as the sublime proof of Christ’s heroism; but we are apt to limit the endurance of its shame and agony to a single day—indeed to the very hour of the last day in which He was crucified.

We forget that its shadow lay over all that life; that indeed it may have stretched back to the misty beginnings of time. He is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, though it is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us perfectly to understand those words. Certainly we see Christ at the outset and very threshold of His life work, talking with a calm familiarity of that dreadful death, showing that He had already taken up the Cross and was enduring it, despising the shame. With what dreadful minuteness He saw it all is evident enough, as He said to His disciples: "The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall spit upon Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall kill Him." Think, as He searched the Scriptures, how there must have come before Him again and again the terrible predictions of the Cross and its attendant horrors. "*My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? . . . They part My garments among them, and cast lots for My vesture.*" As He went into the temple, amidst sacrifice and altar, how vividly that scene stood manifested when He should be led as a lamb to the slaughter! In St. John's Gospel especially there are again and again evidences that all nature to His eyes pointed on to the Cross, signifying what manner of death He should die. He saw it in the very bread, in the grain of wheat, in the sight of the shepherd, in the clustering vine. Christ came along the way of His whole life enduring the Cross, despising the shame.

We honour the hero who *suddenly*, face to face with opportunity, yields to those first thoughts which are the impulses of noble natures, and counting not his life dear to him risks it for another's rescue, or yields it in testimony to the truth. We reverence the heroism of the man who has gone on his way day after day, growing clearer in his perception of the truth and stronger in his devotion to it; day after day led on through a series of smaller sacrifices which, like the sloping altar stairs, lead up to the last great surrender, and prepare him for it when it has to be met. But what heroism is this which for years is face to face with the most terrible death; not merely thinking it *may* come, but from which nothing can possibly deliver Him; from which no escape is for a moment to be entertained; yet hour after hour never flinching, never wavering!

There may be in noble deeds a splendour that invites and fascinates men; but, like sunset hues that give place to dreary darkness, this glow dies speedily when it leads down to coarse want like His Who had not where to lay His head; when from the innermost circle of the family there is doubt and scorn, for neither did His brethren believe in Him; when His holiest utterances are branded as blasphemy; when the miracles of love and power are ascribed to the devil; when the Church condemned Him as a blasphemer; and the fickle people who to-day would make Him a King to-morrow would have Him crucified. Thus day after day to go on

under the weight of that Cross, despising the shame, was indeed the triumph of a splendid heroism.

But all this, wonderful as it is, lies but on the surface. That which adds to it infinitely, which heightens and completes it, is not thus apparent, and itself indicates further depths of which we can but dimly guess. *Of all men that ever lived Jesus Christ alone possessed perfect control over the circumstances of His life.* Other heroes have either defied their circumstances and gloried in triumphing over them; or else have calmly accepted them as beyond their control. Jesus Christ had absolute control over them. How sublimely does the consciousness of this power reveal itself at times! When the band came forth to take Him on the eve of the Crucifixion, and Peter flashes the sword defiantly in the clear light of the moon, Jesus bids him put it up. Could He not summon a legion of angels to His aid, of whom one should suffice to scatter these Gentile forces like chaff before the wind? Think of Him standing in the presence of Herod and his men of war, mocked, smitten, amidst the coarse taunts and cruel laughter of the soldiers, crowned with thorns, covered in the tattered purple, with a reed thrust into His hand for sceptre—and yet He hath power over all worlds! In this lay the opportunity of the life-long temptation, “If Thou be the Son of God, assert Thine authority. Command that these stones be made bread.” Think of all that calm and majestic endurance, not of necessity submitted to,



but of choice accepted. His poverty was not the accident of His birth ; He was poor by the suppression of His power, and weak by the withholding of His might, and suffering by the refusal of deliverance. Others find it difficult to rise ; Christ's effort was to stay on earth. The forces of gravitation about Him were ever upward and heavenward. Others long for more ; He had to check the eager ministry of the angels, to subdue the strength at His disposal. Think of Him having power beyond any that ever lived to minister to His own ease or greatness ; Who had of use and custom such high rank and retinue of splendour ; Whose authority was supreme and universal—and then look upon Him buffeted, beaten, scourged ! See Him standing, bound and bleeding, as Pilate asks, *Art Thou a king ?* See Him hanging upon the Cross, whilst about Him surges that awful storm of taunt and hatred. He saved others, Himself He cannot save ! What a triumph He might have won ! How that disfigured Face might suddenly have shone upon the gathering gloom, whilst from the opened heaven should have trooped the holy angels, and from beneath death and hell should have acknowledged His authority ; and in place of the Cross there was the throne of His glory, and He might have summoned the world to judgment ! That had been indeed a triumph, splendid and overwhelming. But a greater triumph was this, infinitely greater—that having such power *He endured the Cross, despising the shame.*

II. *The Motive*.—For the joy that was set before Him.

To estimate aright the heroism of Jesus Christ we must look carefully at the motive which underlay it all. Nothing would rob the life of Jesus Christ so utterly of all its true meaning, nothing empty it so completely of all beauty, as for us to read into these words a selfish end and purpose. If He came forth seeking by exile and suffering and tears and agony and death to secure His own exaltation, to win a great dominion and authority, then is Jesus Christ only on a level with the heroes of this world, and not even on a level with the highest of them. To say that His kingdom is eternal and spiritual is not to alter the fact that it was to seek such a kingdom that He came; and it is only the accident of their position which shuts other conquerors from making their kingdoms spiritual and eternal. It would have been more tempting to their ambition if it had been within their power. To think for one moment of Jesus Christ balancing His sorrow and death by some future gain of dominion and authority is to degrade, to desecrate that whole life. What of His making Himself of no reputation if thus He sought a greater? What of all that He surrendered if thereby He was going to secure more? No, indeed: in this lies the heroism of Christ—that He had no dominion to gain; no position, no greatness to secure. Heroism is to be measured by the height from which it stoops; by the sacrifice it makes. In

the sublime preface to his Gospel, St. John tells of Him : *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.* Of His greatness and authority there could be no limit—it was the greatness of God. The joy set before Him was not the surroundings of glory, the rapturous adoration of the angels, the control of all nature, the throne of the universe. All that was already His. All that was the joy which He left behind Him. Of the Son it is spoken, *Thy throne, O God, is for ever.* All that, for us men and for our salvation, He laid down. The joy of Jesus, the glory of the Redeemer, can only be the joy of being with His people, helping them, saving them, leading them on to fuller blessedness and greater usefulness and likeness to Himself.

There were two or three occasions in the life of the Blessed Master when He gave us a glimpse into His own great joy, and showed us whence it sprang. *At that hour*, we read, *Jesus rejoiced in spirit.* The English word is a very tame and poor rendering of the original; leapt for gladness, leapt much—such is the truer meaning. *Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, All things are delivered unto Me of My Father.* What then? Does He go on to talk of His dominion, authority, renown? No, indeed. Listen. This is His joy. *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.*

Again, Christ meets His disciples after He is risen from the dead and saith : *All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.* What then ? *Go ye and preach the Gospel to all nations ;* AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD.

This is the only conception of joy of which that Heart is capable. One day the cry is raised against Him by the murmuring Pharisees : *This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.* I think the testimony thrilled the soul of Jesus with Heaven's joy, and He can only at once tell them what that gladness is—Does not the shepherd rejoice when he findeth his sheep that was lost and call his neighbours to rejoice with him ? Does not the woman rejoice who has lost her piece of silver and looking for it diligently finds it at last ? Does not the father rejoice when once again the wanderer is at home safe and sound ?—do not they begin to be merry ? This, this only, is the joy of the Lord—the joy of finding the lost and of bringing them home to the blessedness of the Father's House.

St. John saw the Lord in His glory—His face like the sun in its strength, His eyes like unto flames of fire, the white robes of His royalty girt with a golden girdle. He heard the great chorus singing to Him the rapturous anthem of their praise. The disciple fell at His feet as dead. Is this the Christ—gone up beyond the reach of His people ? No, indeed. He laid His right hand upon him

and said, "Fear not." It was the same gracious Lord. "And He said unto me, Write"—and we bend to listen to the message—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and will open unto Me, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne."

If we see Him amidst the glories of Paradise, it is ever as the Lamb that has been slain; the same all-gracious Lord. "He that sitteth upon the throne doth dwell amongst them; and the Lamb, which is in the midst of them, doth feed them, and lead them to fountains of living waters."

Do not let us put the great Captain of our salvation so far away that we cannot get at Him. Do not think of Him as up so high beyond the battlements of heaven, and within its ranks of holy angels, whilst His poor Bride, the Church, is left to struggle on as best she can! Think you that can ever be His joy—He Who loved the Church, and gave Himself for it? Never! He is entered into His joy, the joy of our help and our deliverance; the joy of saving and blessing us. Consider Him ever at hand for our defence; watchful, and mighty to save. It was thus that the early disciples saw Him, their glorious Captain, leading them forth against their foes. It was thus that Stephen saw Him, the Son of God standing for his deliverance, coming forth to greet him with His "Well done!" It was thus that St. Paul triumphed in the presence of the

Almighty Saviour, when all the forces of Rome and all the cruelties of hell were at hand to destroy the Christians. He seems to delight in looking forth upon the troops of dreadful enemies—persecution, and famine, and distress, and tribulation, and nakedness, and peril—each a captain with a noisy and hideous following, seizing one and another for their prey, so that he cried : “ We are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” But yet—a single look upward, one glimpse of that Face, one grasp of that Hand, and St. Paul was girt and thrilled with omnipotence. “ *In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that hath loved us.*”

The joy of the Lord is not as the King of Heaven, nor is it in a future reign ; it is the joy of helping those who follow Him, in all the way of their life. We want our life lit up with that Presence ; we need to have the glowing assurance of His watch and ward. My brother, if thou hast a Saviour at all, thou hast an almighty Saviour, whose love to thee is as deep and true as when for thee and me He died upon the Cross. Now hath He all power, and He is ever with thee for thy safety. Believe in Him, look up to Him. With Him thou canst not fear. Therefore, be of good courage.



## XIV.

### *THE ROARING LION.*

"Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."—  
I PETER v. 8.

#### PART I.

D R. LIVINGSTONE tells us of an African native who was struck down and torn by a lion, that periodically the dreadful pains returned to the old wound, as if again the monster gnawed and crunched at the bone. So was it, I think, with Peter. The old lion had struck him down and fixed his teeth in his prey. Snatched from the jaws of the destroyer by David's greater Son, yet the scar throbbed with vivid reminders of the peril, and brought again before him the memory of his great deliverance.

It is interesting to think what scene in the life of their glorious Master the different disciples would recall most frequently and treasure most sacredly. In the case of St. John that first finding of the Lamb of God would stand out with minute distinctness ;—and yet even that would grow dim beside



the memories of the Judgment Hall and Calvary. With the Apostle Thomas every thought of the Lord Jesus would run on to that scene of the risen Saviour looking upon him with pity rather than reproof, saying, "Reach hither thy finger ; stretch out thine hand." Again he would seem to touch those sacred scars, and once more his adoring faith would cry exultingly—*My Lord and my God*. But of St. Peter surely this is the text that was written underneath the scene which he recalled most vividly, *Be sober*. There starts before him that rash impulsive Simon of old. *Be vigilant*. There is the forgetful disciple creeping inside the door of the Judgment Hall, and standing amidst Christ's enemies. Swiftly would sweep through his soul the memories of that dreadful denial and all the bitterness that followed. And now out of this man's innermost heart there rings this message : "Be sober, be vigilant ; for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Let us turn and look upon this terrible man-slayer.

I. *Here is a very real enemy.*

He is an old doctor, as Latimer calls him, and well versed in arts and crafts ; but his master-stroke has been reserved for these times. There is a fable of a fox that caught its prey by pretending to be dead. That is the last of Satan's devices. A hundred years ago everything was put down to him—storms, earthquakes, eclipses, plagues, diseases, were all the doings of the devil ; and there was

ascribed to him a power and activity that were almost infinite. Well, we are by no means sorry to see him shorn of his honours. Thanks to science, she has cast the devil out of the hailstorm and the thunder-cloud, and has taught us at least some of the laws which regulate these things. So he has altered his tactics, and with a humility which his betters might imitate he has announced his own decease. "I am dead"—saith the devil—"indeed there is no devil. I am passed away with witchcraft and ghosts and all the silly nonsense of the dark ages." The devil dead! Well, let him not preach that in London. Dead, and the streets are thronged with flaunting vice and the laws of this Christian land are powerless to check it! The devil dead! and the public-houses on the Lord's Day are thronged whilst churches and chapels are deserted. The devil dead! and the poor are ground down in our midst; are housed in hovels where decency is impossible. The devil dead! and yet the war spirit is rampant! and yet the opium trade flourishes! and yet tyrants and oppressors sit in high places! Surely it is an ill compliment to the intelligence of our human nature if we are going to believe that. No, no. We have a more sure word of prophecy to which we do well to give heed. *This old adversary is as real for you and for me as he ever was.* As real for us as he was for Adam, or for Job, or for Judas. *Your* adversary—says the apostle, as if he had marked us out for his prey. We dare not ignore him.

We dare not make light of him. Satan is an awful reality—as real to-day as when he crept into the garden and beguiled our mother Eve. As real as when he hung a foul black shadow muttering his blasphemies at the ear of the Son of God. In spite of Bibles and preaching, he lives and is in our midst, walking about seeking whom he may devour. Sundays and week days, night and day, ever he is busy. He knows no rest: he takes no holiday. None are so busy but he can keep up with them. He is your sworn foe and mine. He tracks our steps and seeks us as his prey. Never a day passes but some are struck down and borne away. Saith Amos the prophet, “The lion hath roared: who shall not fear?” But this old lion hath done more than roar. He hath slain his tens of thousands. Take care. He tracketh our steps and croucheth near at hand. Be sober, be vigilant.

## II. *He is a mighty Foe.*

The glimpses we have of him in the Bible reveal one of vast dominion and of amazing power; probably of all God’s creatures one of the first in the order of time and highest in rank; amongst the foremost of the angels that do excel in strength. There is a majesty about him as of one conscious of vast power. When he had taken the Son of God up to the mountain-top and set before Him the kingdoms of the world and all the glory of them, there was a haughty presumption such as no king ever pretended to, in the vastness of the bribe he

offered, and a more awful presumption in that which he sought to gain by it. *All this will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.* His very titles recognise his power—"the God of this world," "the Prince of the Power of the air." He is no insignificant foe. Opposed by such an one we need indeed be sober and vigilant.

*Think of his triumphs.* Away up in the mountain caves is the den of the lion, the mouth and floor of it all strewn with the bones of his victims ; skulls and ribs lie thickly scattered. But what a sight it were to look into the den of this old Lion the devil, and to see the mischief that he hath wrought ! In Heaven itself he drew down a host of those who kept not their first estate to share his dreadful doom. His subtlety found a way into Paradise,—amidst its beauty and the luscious fruits he crept ; and through him Eden is undone ; the earth is cursed ; the thorns and briars flourish ; and the sweating brow and fretting care become man's heritage. Earth's firstborn Cain is the devil's victim ; and the greedy monster rests not until a guilty world is swept away by the flood. The wicked perish ; yet the wicked one lives on, and as Noah steps from the ark of his deliverance the old lion croucheth waiting for him. Abraham leaves his country and kindred and his father's home, but he cannot leave the devil behind. He goes into a land that he knows not of, but he can find no land which the tempter knows not, and even his splendid

faith is scratched by the tempter. Samson can slay the young lion, rending it like a kid; but the old lion is more than a match for Samson. He can prevail against the gates of Gaza, but the gates of hell prevail against him. Saul is anointed first King of Israel, but that tall and goodly presence seems only to make him a more inviting victim, and the old lion strikes him down. And David—if ever the devil could find his match it should be in the daring shepherd who did not know what fear was. But he dogs David's steps and besets them more hardly than all his enemies; and at last he who slew Goliath and escaped Saul was stricken down and sore wounded by this foe. Solomon could set the world wondering at his wisdom, but the devil outwitted him. And even amongst the twelve this daring devil found one for his prey. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Be sober, be vigilant. I call to mind the young men with whom I began life, and it is terrible to see how one and another have been carried away by the tempter—some of them with the promise of vast usefulness, men that one envied for their prospects and powers. O my brothers, let us so fear this mighty foe and so fear our own folly and weakness that we keep close to the side of our Almighty Helper and Saviour. Be sober, be vigilant.

III. *He is a subtle Foe.*

*Think of his knowledge of human nature.* How perfectly he understands us! For six thousand

years he has been practising his arts, making his gins and snares and traps. What a collection he hath—this mighty hunter! How well he knows what bait to use and where to set it! How exactly he knows the inclination of each—what each loves and what each hates, what each fears and what each seeks! As an old Puritan says, “He taketh the measure of every man’s foot; and then he fitteth him instantly.” Therefore let us put up a double guard on the side of our weakness. Watch most carefully against the sin that does most easily beset. There let valour hold command; and let the watchman stand. What is it? The fiery temper, the hasty word? How many have been caught by this evil! Or is it the cold scorn—the contempt almost more deadly than fierce temper? Is it lust which threatens; or pride, that subtlest of all sins; or intemperance, that hideous devil; or indolence, that opiate with which he drugs the soul; or haste to be rich, that snare which is amongst the most successful of his arts? Of this let us be sure—he knows *our* weak place, whether we know it or not. Be sober, be vigilant, and, most of all, be sober and be vigilant where the peril threatens most. It is then that the devil can do most harm when he finds a traitor-wish within the soul—into whose ear he can whisper, a traitor that he can bribe.

And not only of our failings and besetments does he make use. *Our very virtues he tries to turn into handles for his malice.* Here is a pleasant, genial,

good-hearted fellow—ah! the devil leads him on and tumbles him into the ditch of self-indulgence, or fetcheth him away by evil company. This man is thrifty and saving: and the devil edges and elbows him on year after year until he casts him into that horrid pit of miserliness. This man is generous, but the devil puffs him up with the sense of his importance, and he would have been richer for ever if he had been poorer. This man is very humble, and the devil pushes him down so far in the valley of humility that he begins to climb up the other side and is proud of being so humble. This man is resolute and determined, and the devil eggs him on until he is overbearing and tyrannical. And this man is modest and retiring, and the devil keeps him lazy and useless by assuring him that he has no gifts. He can do almost as much with our virtues as with our vices. I have met with presumptuous faith; and proud condescension; and self-willed self-denial; and pity that made so much of itself and its gift that it beggared the beggar; and zeal that ever undid more than it could ever do. Ah, my soul, be so afraid of thyself that it is never safe for thee to stir from the side of thy Lord. Be sober, be vigilant; thy adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.





## XV.

### *THE ROARING LION.*

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."—  
I PETER v. 8.

#### PART II.

*FOR all conditions and for all circumstances the Tempter has his attack.*

Turn to the great temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It must have been with an awful consciousness of strength that Satan entered upon that conflict face to face and foot to foot with the Son of God. Mark at the outset that it was when John the Baptist had seen and welcomed the Messiah, and when the Heavens were opened upon Him and there had come the glorious assurance of the Divine Father, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased;"—when the Spirit had descended as a dove and lit upon Him, then it is that He is led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Our best times have their besetments. The nearest to Heaven that we can reach whilst on earth will not free us from peril. And times of blessing do pro-

voke the special assaults of the tempter. Burglars do not break into houses away in Whitechapel and the lanes of St. George's-in-the-East. There is not enough to tempt them ; they haunt the West End or the wealthy suburbs.

But now the Christ is faint and hungry, spent with the long fast and vigil in the wilderness. Then comes the Tempter,—“*If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*” He spares not the poor and needy,—a coward who kicks us when we are down. If things are against us he bids us take the matter into our own hands and provide for ourselves. Heaven has forgotten us, it is plain, so we had better turn to earth. The dead and barren rocks have more pity and shall yield us readier help than Heaven. Ah, to how many a hungry man, to how many a hungry woman he comes, dodging them day and night,—that black shadow, muttering his foul suggestion,—“God has forsaken you here in this wilderness. You *must* live, you know ; and you must help yourself as best you can. There is no help for it,—steal ; sin ; fetch your bread out of the stones, since Heaven has ceased to pity you.” Hunger is an awful ally of the tempter. See, I beseech you,—*the angels came and ministered unto Him*,—the devil never did that, never. He hath nothing to give and no heart to give it. Let us make haste to follow the angels' example :—minister to the hungry and tempted. Your good cheer shall not only fill empty stomachs,—which is much, very

much: but thus shall you strengthen men and women and little children to fight the devil. Depend upon it, it is a thousand times easier to be amiable and grateful and generous when you are well-fed than when you are hungry. Tyndall says that Alpine mutton is moral. Well, be assured that penny breakfasts and good soup-kitchens and brotherly sympathy and little bits of love are instruments of righteousness; instruments of warfare not wholly carnal, but blessedly spiritual and divine.

Then notice further that with the changed condition comes another temptation perfectly adapted. If it is well with us and we stand on the pinnacle the tempter plies us with thoughts that tend to presumption—"A favourite of Heaven such as you are can do anything, dare anything. Show your splendid trust in God by casting yourself down from the pinnacle, and His angels shall bear you up in their hands." And when we stand on the mountain top, and the tempter begins to unfold his treasures to our view—gain, or pleasure, or honour, and possibly in the background a hazy bit of usefulness thrown in—"There," he whispers, "do not be too particular: there really is not much harm in it, and it is only once: to make a habit of it would of course be very wrong. And you will really be in a position to do so much good, too!"

Be not ignorant of his devices. No condition is there but has its temptation: no circumstance but Satan knows well how to deal with it.

*Then, again, he seeks to turn our very mercies to our mischief.* The lusciousness and beauty of the fruit in Paradise is made to awaken Eve's desire ; and when she wished for it, lo ! there it was hanging within reach. Esau faints, and the devil has that savoury mess of pottage wherewith to tempt. Noah plants the vine, and there is the devil at hand to make him drunk with it. Jonah would fly from his duty, and there is a ship to take him on board. Judas wants money, and there is the jingle of the thirty pieces in his ears. The devil has his providence. Such is our foe. Against one so mighty and subtle we must be on our guard. Be sober, be vigilant ; for this is *your* adversary.

*He is a cruel Foe.* A lion for his might, he is also a lion for his savage cruelty. His name is Apollyon, the Destroyer. Nothing will satisfy him but to gloat over his prey in his own dreadful place of torment. He means our destruction. To this he bends his energies ; for this his plans are laid ; for this he ever lies in wait. To worry if he cannot overthrow ; to annoy if he cannot destroy. At the fall the earth was cursed ; the serpent was cursed ; *but not the man.* To him is given the great promise of redemption and deliverance. And now the purpose of the devil is to drag the man down to his own depths. And only when the tempter is listened to and served shall there come that last awful sentence from the lips of the world's loving and pitiful Redeemer, spoken with unutterable grief,—“ Depart

from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." You can trace his steps by the misery he works. God's will found expression in the joy and beauty of Paradise, in the uprightness and dominion of man, in the absence of all fear and sorrow from the earth. But the Destroyer turns it to thorns and briars, and leaves the righteous Abel murdered at the gate of Paradise. The way of Jesus Christ was traced by the miracles of His love, —blind men amazed at the glory of the vision that burst upon them; dumb men whose lips were loosened and their mouths filled with laughter and song; lame men that leapt as the hart; those possessed of devils clothed and in their right minds; withered and diseased ones finding a joy like heaven in the new life that bounded in their veins. And so it is still. With us here are men and women, scores and hundreds of them, who can testify that Jesus can still open blind eyes, and can cast out devils, and can heal broken hearts, and mend ruined homes, and bring a very heaven where hell had reigned. But the devil's work, alas! who does not know it? Men degraded into brutes,—nay, that is a libel on the brutes,—into fiends; women bruised and battered; the cry of poor little ill-used children. "O, sir," said one to me one day, as gentle and loving a man as ever lived, "I loved my wife better than my life, but when I was drunk it was as if the devil was in me, and I always began knocking her about. I beat her one night so that she could eat nothing but spoon

meat for eleven days. And then when I saw what I had done I had to get drunk again just to forget it." He is a cruel monster, a hard master, unsparing, pitiless, driving his poor slave to lowest depths. I was preaching in a large town some months ago, and as I was passing out in the crowd there came up to me a poor haggard creature, hugging her scanty dress about her; and thrusting her way up to my side she said,—“Are you Mr. Pearse?”

“Yes,” I said, “I am.”

“Do you remember So-and-So?”

At once there rose before me the recollection of a girl as gentle and lovely as any I ever saw, living amidst the surroundings of a happy home, and amidst all beauty and luxury. I started back in horror. There in the gaslight I looked upon a face sodden and brutalised,—every mark of womanhood gone out of it.

“Are *you* So-and-So?” I asked, in amazement.

“Yes,” she gasped, and then turned and rushed away and was lost in the crowd.

And not in squalor and in want only does he make his misery. It is almost worse to see broken hearts and ruined lives and uttermost wretchedness amidst luxury and wealth and splendour. O, it is a cruel devil, a roaring lion that rendeth and destroyeth: he goeth about seeking whom he may devour. He means our destruction.

LASTLY, THIS OLD LION CAN BE OVERCOME.

*Be sober, be vigilant.* The first word suggests our

peril from *over-eagerness*. People who go rushing into anything and everything, rush into the lion's den and thrust their heads into his very mouth. There are some people that the old lion must hunt for, but the over-eager he can get by lying still. They go into any company ; they engage in any business and any amount of it ; they take up any matter with warmth and energy. They have no time ever to step out of the midst of things and look at them all round in the light of God,—they must go rushing on. The Devil tempts some people, but these people tempt the Devil. It is a terrible peril, in these times of business competition, when a whirl is in the very air, and the tendency to gambling and speculation is so easily caught from thousands who are mad with this feverish haste to be rich. *Be sober*. Take a right estimate of things. Measure things by God and by eternity. Don't be too thirsty—that is the meaning of the precept—too thirsty for pleasure ; too thirsty for money ; too thirsty for honour ; too thirsty for your own way in everything. Join a score of “temperance societies,” and let the great rule of temperance apply to everything. Travellers tell us that there are certain places where you may generally trace the steps of the old lion and expect to find him waiting about. *They are the drinking places*, where he can spring upon his prey in a moment. This old lion haunts the drinking places of our land, and there finds his helpless prey ; for all over-eagerness, all fierce thirst is a peril. *Be sober*.



And yet *be vigilant*. The too anxious are in peril; but so are the too careless. The one set go on too fast and lose the Master's care in that way—the other set lag too far behind, and in that way get into danger. They that follow afar off, as Peter had done, fall a prey to the lion. Those who go along sleepily, and who like the prophet of old are always ready to halt at anybody's bidding, specially if the bidding be to eat and drink—a lion kills them. *Be sober*—yet be neither stupid nor sleepy. *Be vigilant*.

But is that all? If that is all, it shall avail us nothing. What is the good of telling the little lamb to be sober and vigilant when the old lion is about? Are soberness and vigilance a match for his craft and strength? If that is all—eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, if not indeed to-day. We must go further back and further forward for the instructions as to our safety. *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God*. Be so little and so weak that you have no faith in yourself at all—and creep for your safety in under that mighty hand. *Humble yourself*—that is a grace that the Proud Lucifer does not understand. A little humility will do more to baffle him than anything else, as bats and owls are dazed by the light of the sun. Who am I that I should be fretting for greatness, and greedy for self-indulgence! What am I that I should venture to go choosing for myself what is good or wise! That mighty Hand leads me, and keeps me, and orders all my affairs. I would

sooner have His choice than my own way. I will, therefore, give in to Him in all things, and wait upon Him to know His will.

*Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you.* Beneath that Hand I cannot know a fear. Here am I as within a fortress whose walls can neither be scaled nor undermined. I walk the buttressed heights, and here is Omnipotence for my safety and ten thousand shining ones are set for my defence.

Be sober, be vigilant, that you wander not from the place of safety, your stronghold in God. Little lamb, be not so greedy after buttercups and daisies that thou dost suffer thy shepherd to go out of thy sight. Keep close to His side, and even thou, with Him to help thee, art more than a match for the old lion. That Presence alone is our safety. *Whom resist steadfast in the faith.* Be bold because thine hand is in the hand of thy God. Be glad that thou art His and He is thine.

So then make this the rule of life. *Start the day with a clear view of Jesus Christ.* Let the heart have a deep glad sense of His Presence. Let prayer be more than petition. Let it be a passing into the very Court of the King to claim Him for your help and care. And then through the day lift up the eyes and heart to Him. Be like the fisherman who is busied in the cabin about a score of things that must be seen to—but every now and then the head is thrust out; the helm is trimmed a little; he lifts

his eyes to the sky and sees as to the wind ; he searches the sea for any approaching craft ; and then down again to work, singing a cheery song.

So look out and look up, that thou keep near to thy Lord, for He and He only is thy safety against this cruel and crafty foe.



## XVI.

### *THE SOWER: A PICTURE OF THE SUCCESSFUL WORKER.*

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”  
—PSALM cxxvi. 6.

#### PART I.

*HE* goeth forth. At once there rises before us the figure of the sower, as with short, quick step he goes over the furrows holding the seed-basket and casting forth the fair showers of seed upon the earth. *He sets about it*; that is the first lesson which the words teach us. “Well,” you say to yourself, “a very obvious lesson that.” Exactly; and because so obvious it is apt to be overlooked and forgotten.

Let us look in on the man who lives in the farmhouse yonder. His fields are full of weeds; the plough lies rotting and rusting in rank growth; the hedges are not pruned; the ditches are choked; the fences are falling. And now as we come and talk with him of these things, he shakes his head quite piously. He is sorry, very sorry—indeed, it much distresses him, and he is very anxious that

something should be done; but what can *he* do? He is not gifted as other people are; he wishes that he was; *then* he would do wonders. He has tried his hand now and then at spudding up a thistle; but nothing comes of it. And he sighs again quite piously. How much religion there is in a sigh! with some people it is all they have.

You don't know such a man? I do; hosts of them—not outside the Church, perhaps; but *inside* they swarm—people who talk so sweetly about desiring to be useful. Sometimes they think they *might* do this and sometimes that; but it never comes to anything, and it never will. *They never set about it.* Most men fail in doing good, not because of clumsy sowing or neglected hoeing or unskilful harvesting, not because the seed is bad or the soil is hard, but just because they never set about it. They do not get up and do it. The sower wastes no time in devising or dreaming. It has to be done, and it never will be done except by doing it. So he *goeth forth*.

And does the dreamer attempt to excuse himself by saying, "Well, you see, there is one thing. If I do no good, yet I do no harm"? Ah, what madness is this! No harm? Seest thou that stretch of nettles, how it is plaguing thy neighbours for miles? and that crop of thistles is spreading across the parish. No harm! And that land ought to be bringing forth good seed! Is such waste no harm? Nay, there is only one way to do no harm in God's

world, and that is to do all the good thou canst. To do nothing is to do nothing but harm.

Surely this may set the most careless of us thinking. God puts every man, as He put the first, in a garden to dress it and to till it. And day by day each man's influence is going forth, filling his field with tares and thistles, with briars and thorns, or with good seed. Why put the evil things first? Because they come of their own accord; to do nothing is to grow them. What, then, are we doing with our lives? The field of the life is God's book of judgment, therefore look well to it. What are you doing *in business*? Setting yourself in God's name against everything that is underhand and mean, whether it pays or whether it does not pay? Or are you, with silly excuses which shall never excuse, letting all the field of the business be choked with foul weeds?—no love, no patience, no helpfulness, no generous dealing; only keen advantage-taking, counting that gain however gotten is golden. What, think you that big giving can undo crooked getting? What, wouldst thou bribe the Almighty with gold and blind Him with gifts! What is our life? Is it a round of silly pursuits, with nothing in it at all that is worthy of one made in the image of God, nothing helpful or blest to any living soul? We are in this world for this one thing only; for this one thing we have received the mystery of life and reason and opportunity, that we may take the seed-basket and go forth filling

the field with good fruit. This is the only way of doing our work in God's great world,—having our own little patch of life well cultivated.

*He goeth forth because he is sent.*

We know who is the Lord of the harvest—Who sendeth forth His labourers into the harvest. This man with the seed-basket is not the master; he is the servant. He lives on his master's wages, he is fed by his master's bounty, he is sheltered by his master's roof, and he knows well enough that it is all for this one end—that *he may do his master's work*. See him, as day after day he waits upon the master to know his will. "Well," saith the master, "I want you to go to-day and sow ten acres of wheat." And the man goes right away to do it. He does not think it any great hardship that he should do the work; he is there on purpose.

That is the first great lesson which we have to learn. We call One our Lord and Master; we live on His bounty; we breathe His air; we see by His light; we eat at His board; reason, health, every faculty is entrusted to us by Him. What then? Life has but one meaning, one purpose; it is that we may do His work. Into our lives as into His there must come the might of a Divine compulsion. "I *must—must* work the works of Him that sent me." Beware of the picking and choosing and making many conditions. Our starting-



point in the religious life, as well as our resting-place, is here—ever here—low down at the Master's feet, asking earnestly, "LORD, WHAT WILT THOU HAVE ME TO DO?"

*In this sense of being sent the servant finds his fitness and strength for service.*

The labourer is not allowed in the granary helping himself; he would be sent speedily about his business if the master saw that. But when the master says, "John, go to-day and sow the ten acres with wheat," John knows he may have the key of the granary and get as much seed-corn as he needs. Think of Little Faith hearing that order. At once he falls a-sighing and fretting. "I have to go and sow the wheat, and I have only got twelve shillings a week! How am I going to pay for the seed-corn out of that?" What master would be plagued with such a servant? Ah, thus is it that unbelief plagues the Heavenly Master. When our Lord bids us go, be quite sure that He will give us all that we need for the errand—all strength and wisdom and gifts are ours then. "If I had wings," said Charles Wesley to John, "I would fly." "If God bade thee fly," said John, "He would give thee wings." Of course He would. When He sends His servants forth He gives them the key of heaven's storehouse.

*He goeth forth—because the fields are ready.*

Ignorance is in great haste. It has heard the Master's orders—"Go forth and sow," and off it

starts with the seed-basket and prides itself on its strong arm and skilful cast.

"Stay, Ignorance, stay. Thou art wasting thy Master's goods and thine own strength."

"How so?" quoth Ignorance.

"*Why, man, thou hast forgotten to plough.*" The seed flung out among grasses and weeds can never find any root, and shall never yield a harvest. Neither seed, nor sower, nor soil, nor seasons shall avail anything without the ploughing. Of all the processes in the spiritual harvest this is the one upon which most depends, and yet this is the one which is most easily neglected. The ploughshare must be driven from end to end of the field, or all else will be an utter failure. The Sunday-school teacher may gather the children, the lessons may be well prepared, the class may be attentive, but *has the plough been at work?* The preacher meets his people; there may be freshness, interest, good feeling, yet it is all a waste of good seed unless the plough has been at work. It is only when the blessed Spirit of God opens the heart that the seed can get into the soil and take root. "Whose heart the Lord opened," we read of Lydia. Then Paul's preaching shall bear fruit. The preparation of the heart is from the Lord; but because it is of the Lord do not let us think either that we are not responsible for it, or that we cannot be sure of it.

The gift of the Holy Ghost is ours for the asking. Our preparing is made effectual only by prepraying;

there must be the earnest pleading for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and then a whole-hearted dependence upon His life-giving energy. If that be lacking all else will avail nothing. Moody's saying should be written in gold—" *I would rather pray like Daniel than preach like Gabriel.*" And the one leads to the other ; your praying saint is soon winged for service.

*He goes forth—because he expects a harvest.* Of course he does. He is but a slovenly and useless sower who is not confidently expecting a harvest. We can afford to make little of the unbelief that calls itself philosophic, that thinks it the sign of a superior intellect to doubt everything that our grandfathers believed. The mischievous kind of unbelief is that which thinks itself pious—the unbelief that thinks it savours of a sweet resignation and kind of humility to doubt, that sighs about doing our best and *leaving the rest with God*, as if that were the most perilous thing possible—the unbelief that bases and buttresses itself with Scripture quotations about Paul planting and Apollos watering, but it is only the Lord that can give the increase. There is no such arrant nonsense in the Bible. The language is the bold utterance of a triumphant faith—Paul planted, Apollos watered, and *God gave the increase.* Of course He did. He always does. If we do our part be quite sure that there cannot be any failure on His side. There is no foothold for doubt there.

Look, I pray you, at Farmer Faith ; it is good to let one's eyes rest upon him, so resolutely does he set to work, and such an easy, quiet confidence is there in it all as he flings out the seed and steps over the furrows. And now there comes Little Faith.

"What are you doing, sir ?" he asks.

"Sowing the seed," says Faith.

"But really, sir, you do not mean that you are throwing away the corn ! I am sure I would not. I should keep it."

"Then, friend, thou wouldst never have any harvest."

"But a harvest !—surely you do not expect to get a harvest by throwing the seed down there into the earth, do you ?"

"Of course I do," cries Faith with a smile.

"But think of the risks you run—the frost may kill it, and the rains may rot it, and the rooks may eat it ; and there are sparrows at your heels ! I should be frightened."

"Yes," says Faith untroubled, "that's true."

"Well, then," says Unbelief, "the winter is coming, and the east wind of the spring ; and if it ever should come to anything, why, it may rain all through the harvest."

"It may, certainly," says Faith, smiling still.

"Then all will be spoiled. I am sure I would not risk the loss of it like that."

Then Farmer Faith dips his hand deep in the basket and takes up a handful of it.

"Where did that come from?" he asks.

"Well, out of the ground, I suppose," says Little Faith.

"Exactly; and there were frosts, and floods, and east winds, and rooks, and sparrows, and all the dreadful things when that grew; and yet here it is. And He Who gave me the seed corn can give me the harvest, and *He will too!* Blessed be His name!"

And Farmer Faith goes on his way rejoicing.

Why, the seed itself is proof and promise of the harvest. You and I do surely carry with us that which should for ever silence unbelief. What, think you it is no good trying to do any good amongst such a set, so ignorant, so hardened, so careless, exposed to so many temptations, and so much evil as they are! Has not God in His grace brought thee and me to the knowledge of His truth and to faith in Him, hard, and dark, and cold, and dead as we were? And He Who has made the Gospel of His salvation effectual for our salvation, can He not make it effectual for these too? Be *quite sure of the harvest*. This seed is the Word of God; and as surely as the seed corn is fitted to the earth, so surely is this fitted to men's hearts. And as surely as the corn can unfold strength and beauty in the dark earth, and grow up amidst frost, and bleak winds, and droughts, to bless the world, so surely can this bring forth love, and peace, and joy, and all the fruits and flowers of God in the lives of men,



## XVII.

### *THE SOWER: A PICTURE OF THE SUCCESSFUL WORKER.*

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”—PSALM cxxvi. 6.

#### PART II.

WE have already followed the sower going forth. Let us set him before us again. “Though he weepeth,” the Revised Version has it. So then a successful sower *is a man with a heart in him*. Cold duty, dead formality, humdrum routine—these are not the servants that sow the precious seed in such a way as to get a harvest. When a famous painter was asked what he mixed his colours with to get such effects, he said, tapping his forehead, “With brains, sir.” If you ask the successful sower what he dresses his seed with, the answer is *heart-longings*. Heaven stands unmoved by all the assaults of hell and its hosts. He Who sitteth on the throne laughs at the defiance of His foes. The Lord hath them in derision. But there is one thing heaven cannot resist. The pearly gates fly open instantly at the

touch of a broken heart. When our hearts are breaking with longing, other hearts must be broken *then*. Prim Propriety and easy-going Indifference may come home empty-handed; but a soul on fire with longing cannot fail. *He goeth forth and weepeth*. When a man weepeth it usually means just nothing at all, or else it means a very great deal. Then he is either a coward or a conqueror, either fear prevails or he has girt himself with a desperateness which can die sooner than yield. The difficulties are real; the hindrances are many; the discouragements thicken; perils spring up on every side, but yet he goeth on. His tears are not his weakness; with him they are for victory.

*It is this whole-hearted determination for the Lord Jesus Christ that we need and that we must have.* Alas! how timid are we for Him—we who can be bold enough about everything else. How lightly turned aside, we whom opposition elsewhere only makes more resolute! Do not think this fear and uselessness are only to be sighed about, or even wept about only. They are to be prayed about, and in the name of God they are to be got rid of.

Now let us turn to that which is of much importance, *the Seed*. And that is exactly what it is rendered in the new version—*the seed*. There is but one.

Have you ever thought about it—this wondrous power of the seed? I stood awhile ago upon the



cliffs, and looked out over the great stretch of ocean, and up into the glories of the skies, and down over the steep precipice, here a sheer wall of rock, and there an outstanding tower as of some old castle, and there again a mass of jagged rocks, and yet again a little hollow green with grasses and ferns, and gay with golden furze and purple heather. I began to think of the mighty forces of Nature. The sun in the heavens with its ceaseless pouring forth of light and heat, infinite in its influence and resistless energy. I thought of the forces of gravitation and electricity; and then of the forces that were more manifest about me—the wind that lightly ruffled the sea, and I thought of it in its rage as it swept and howled and drove the helpless ships upon the rocks; the forces of the tides and the great waves that came arched and majestic to the shore and broke in thunder. I thought of the silent frosts that gnawed into the cliffs; the trickling springs that loosened and undermined them. And yet these forces and all of them put together could only touch the outside condition of things. *They could in no wise change the nature.* The great rocks hurled from these heights far down below, and there dashed into fragments, are rocks still—caught by the restless sea and ground by raging storms to fine sand, and lightly swept across the bay—great as is the change, yet is it but a change of circumstance and condition only. Then at my feet there trembled in the breeze a little spray of purple heather. I picked it, and

held it up, and said within myself, This is mightier than they all. This little hidden flower is greater than the sun—greater than winds and waves and thunders. This can take hold of the earth, and of the sun, and of the rain, and of the forces about it, and transform them into life, into beauty, and blessedness and truth. That is the power of the seed.

*The seed is the Word of God*, said the Great Teacher. About us are many forces, social, political, educational. They are mighty to change the condition and circumstance of men. Let us rejoice in their might, and do all that in us lies to see that these forces are rightly used; and pray God that those who control them may have His Wisdom as their Guide. Yet these, neither any one of them nor all of them put together, can transform *the nature*. That abides, and unless you can find something more and greater, these alone must fail. Here is the transforming power—the Word of God quickened and vitalised by the Holy Spirit. Let us have a boundless faith in this Word—the great declaration of the love of God; the salvation which is in Jesus Christ—these shall yet turn the world from a wilderness to a garden of the Lord, a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. See how the history of the nations of the earth is shaped by this transforming power. Look at Saul of Tarsus, a blasphemer, a persecutor, a murderer, changed into the great Apostle, and setting at work a force which at last overthrew Rome and all her

gods. Look at Luther, rising up, in the truth of the Word, from a pining monk into the fearless prophet, liberating the life of the nations that now lead the world. Look at John Wesley, the rigid formalist, away in Aldersgate Street yonder, having, as he says, "a strange warmth at my heart and a blessed persuasion wrought into me that *the Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me,*" and going forth to re-create this England of ours. And to-day about us on every side are thousands and tens of thousands who do know the transforming power of this glorious Gospel of the blessed God, that it can take hold of the heart and uplift and hallow and purify us, and turn us into use and worth, and array us with the beauty of the Lord our God. *The seed is the Word of God.*

Yet, again, *Let us look into the seed-basket.*

Better not go at all than go with seed that may turn out to be weeds and tares. Zeal and energy will only do the more harm unless the seed be right. To this let us give earnest heed, that the seed be *good seed.*

It would be amusing if it were not that so much depended upon it to test some of the theories of the day by a practical and common-sense process like that of the sower. Here, for instance, is a man who goes forth with the seed-basket. "What are you sowing?" asks one. "Well," says the sower, doubtfully, "I am not quite sure; I used to think that it was wheat—they said so when I was a lad,

but there are so many new notions springing up now that I am not quite sure about it."

"Well, it is a very serious matter. Had you not better stay until you do know?"

Then the sower, amiably inclining to the latest suggestion, sits down. There comes another.

"What ails you, sir? Why sit you thus?"

"Well, you see, I am not quite sure about the seed. Can you tell me what it is?"

"No, my dear sir," replies this learned man; "you never can be quite sure about it in this world. But really that does not matter, not in the least, if you only *mean right*. Everything is in the *intention*, you know."

"Oh, I mean right enough," says the sower, greatly relieved, and thinking what an immensely clever man this is. Then away he goes, flinging out the seed as if to make up for lost time.

Then comes the master: "Ho, there, what are you sowing?"

"Well, I don't quite know, sir, but I *mean* right."

"What impudence is this!" cries the master indignantly. "What has that got to do with it? Meaning right won't turn nettle-seed into barley, and dock-seed into oats, and thistle-down into wheat!" And that master shall quickly rid himself of that sower. Alas that it is only for the heavenly Master that men will tolerate such sowers! there where it is infinitely worse surely, where the fields are immortal souls, and the seed with which men trifle is a matter of eternal import.

In sharp contrast with such a sower is one who comes along his way, strong and firmly planting his steps, his face bright with hope, flinging out the seed that falls like a shower of gold to the earth. Here is no doubt ; a man this who knows right well what he is doing and who has a joy in doing it. Now across the fields comes some dignified intruder and bids him stop. The sower looks about him, somewhat resenting the summons, and waits until the newcomer is at his side.

Then the intruder begins to cross-question him.

"Are you duly qualified to sow?"

"Yes, I think I am," saith the sower, wondering.

"Remember that sowing is a matter of vast importance. Do you know all about the nature of the seed? Do you understand the physiology of its growth? and have you studied all that learned men tell us about the process of its development?"

"No, sir ; indeed I don't," says the sower.

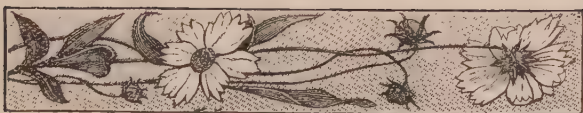
"But really, how can you sow unless you know all these things? How do you know, for instance, that this is good seed at all?"

Ah ! it is good to see the sower then. There is no mistake about that. The man's face lights up with a smile. "Know it, sir? Why, how should I know it, but one way? *I have been feeding upon it for months past.* I have got the strength of it in me now. I had my breakfast off it this morning as fine a bit of wheaten bread as ever I wish to eat."

*That is everything.* When a man has Christ in his heart, the hope of glory; when his own soul is exulting in the consciousness of God's love; when he himself is feeding on the Word, and walking in the strength and blessedness of it, then and then only is he fitted for going forth with the seed-basket.

Then follows the promise—*He shall doubtless come again, bringing his sheaves with Him.* The sower shall shout in the joy of his harvest. He goes forth in the dull winter when leaden clouds hang overhead, and the wild winds moan dismally, and the rain-showers sweep suddenly upon him, and the dead leaves are swept by every gust, and the trees stretch up their bare black arms to heaven. But though it begin thus, it hath another ending. There comes the happy time when the row of reapers bend over the falling corn; when they that bind the sheaves are busy, and others pile the shocks; when the laden waggons go homewards with the precious burden, and about the farmsteads are they who build the stacks. Then shall the sower come again. Ah, my brother! it is good toiling for a Master like ours. He gives good wages. He who went out with handfuls shall come home with armfuls. He who scattered seed shall gather sheaves. He who went out with a basket shall come with a waggon-load.

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the word of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."*



## XVIII.

### *HEROD THE HEARER, THE WAVERER, THE SCORNER.*

“Herod feared John. And when he heard him, he did many things and heard him gladly.”—MARK vi. 25.

“And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him.”—LUKE xxiii. 11.

THE story that we would follow is that of the truth heard and enjoyed; yet the truth not yielded to: and then scorned.

#### I. HEROD THE HEARER.

He sits listening eagerly; his face full of interest fixed on the preacher; the eyes aglow, the soul stirred. And before him stands the chained prisoner—the long hair falling about the sinewy figure, like another Elijah; his dress the robe of camel's hair girt with a leathern girdle. A man who knows nothing about dainty words and polished sentences; thundering a stern summons to repent. It is a strange sight—this proud, weak, lustful Herod sitting hearing this plain-spoken preacher and hearing him gladly. If King Herod were to come to our service John the Baptist is the last preacher we should select. Send



for Isaiah with his poetry ; or Ezekiel with his pictures ; or Apollos with his eloquence ; or St. Paul with his mighty intellect. But John the Baptist—he will be sure to offend the king. He does not make any allowance for people's temptations and circumstances. Very likely he will tell him to his face that he ought not to have his brother's wife. And besides, he has only got one sermon—always harping away upon his one string—Behold the Lamb of God. See how he talked to the Pharisees, and before the common people too—calling those eminently religious and respectable gentlemen “a generation of vipers.” He says such “strong things”—and that is so very offensive. He actually warned them to flee from the wrath to come—as if such well-to-do folks were ever in danger of going that way ! This John cannot adapt himself to his audience, and is altogether the last man to preach before the king.

*But Herod heard him ; and heard him gladly.*

You will find the same thing again and again in the Scriptures and in every age, down to our own times—that men sit and listen eagerly to the very truth that condemns them. It was so when Felix sat on the bench and Paul the prisoner stood at the bar, and forgetting his defence began to preach his beloved gospel ; and the judge sent often to commune with him. It was so when King Agrippa sat amidst his nobles, and the prisoner Paul stood again in his chains and preached Christ and Him crucified. Nor is it so only in the case of one or two like these

—so used to flattery that it is a new thing to find a man who speaks the honest truth. It was so with the crowds described in Ezekiel. The streets are thronged with the eager people going up by the walls and saying one to another—"Come, I pray you, and let us hear the word of the Lord." Orderly and attentive "they sit," saith the Lord, "as My people sit." No tedious duty was it that they are glad to have done with ; no burden that custom has laid upon them. For said the Lord, *Thou art unto them as a lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument : for they love My words, but do them not.* So was it in Isaiah's time—to whom the message came, "Cry aloud : spare not. Lift up thy voice as a trumpet. Show My people their transgressions and the House of Israel their sins—*Yet they seek Me daily and delight to know My ways.*"

It was not a peculiarity of other ages. There are thousands throughout our land to-day who are doing the same thing. They seek out the preacher who deals most plainly ; they like him best whose utterances come ablaze from the soul's deepest convictions. This too is as God's own Presence in the world—this acknowledged power, this homage that men yield to the felt, the living truth. Surely it is a sign that earth is not wholly orphaned from God—that our poor humanity has got some trace in it of its lofty origin. Amidst the unlovely things that are baptized into Christian names—the selfishness and heartlessness that the world calls *prudence*—

the crafty concealing of the truth that the world calls *smartness*—the pride and scorn of others which the world calls *dignity*—the keen advantage-taking that men call *cleverness* (when it is not against themselves)—amidst these things let some man speak out from his very heart the truth—meaning it with all his soul; and down in their truer selves men believe it and honour it. I know that there is another side to all this—that men resent it and punish it, and that martyrdom has been the penalty that such honest men have had to pay for their honesty. But the very array of power against the truth, the dungeon and the stake are the tribute to its triumphant force. We hear again the watchword, “This is the heir—come let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours.” *Herod heard him and heard him gladly.* Thou man of God, poor, friendless, helpless in the grasp of this tyrant—thou art greater than the king and all his mighty men of war for that in thy soul there lives and burns and shines the truth. To-day let us gird ourselves afresh in the force of this conviction—that the mightiest power in God’s world is to be true to the truth. Speak it, act it, live it through and through, with a tremendous conviction that God Himself is at the back of it. Rest and rejoice in it—that the truth in smallest things throbs with the omnipotence of God.

## II. HEROD THE WAVERER.

The sermon is done. Herod bids the guards take

the preacher back to his dungeon. And the king is left to himself, pacing his room thoughtfully to and fro ; with the glow of the service upon him, and the force of the words stirring him.

“ Ah, I like to hear him. An honest man—that is indeed the life worth living. How little a thing it is—what may be *outside* a man. Crown and palace and burden of my state, what are they alongside of a life like that ! The man himself is everything—he spake the truth ; he’s greater than a king—I envy him—I could almost change places with him. Better be true with a fetter on the wrist, than be a king and yet be false to what is right and good. It is a shame to keep such a man in a dungeon. If I could only manage it I should like to have him about me as my adviser.” And then his majesty stops and sighs. “ But, alas ! how hard it is for a king to do as he likes ! ”

That is what the truth always does in God’s world—it uplifts the man from his surroundings. It shows the man the greatness that is possible to him, and that is demanded of him. “ Thou a man ” —it says—“ so great, so godlike in thine origin and opportunity—and yet a trembling slave of lust ; a coward, frittering away thy life in folly, and sinking down lower and more helpless in thy fear. And thou a man ! ”

And does the plain word of the preacher go yet deeper into Herod’s soul and stir yet another thought in him ? Sadducee though he call himself,

denying the resurrection, I can think that there comes yet a more solemn consideration.

“ If—outside this life there lie another life, where—in men do come face to face with God—what then? When this hand shall drop the sceptre, and this head lies level with the dust, and I be all discrowned, disrobed, forsaken of my lords, untended by my guards—what then? To have lived for a present advantage only, and all advantage left for others to inherit! A slave of lust—and all the passions burning still, and yet that awful loneliness! O, he is right. *Then* to stand before God true to Him, true to all things noble and pure and good—that is to stand fitted for His high service, to sit at His right hand and share the glory of the King of kings.”

Now comes Herodias with a sneer on her lip and eyes that flash in scorn. The interview is a short one, but it has done its work. Now Herod is alone again—but the tone is changed. “ This man does not understand. These preachers never do; brought up in the wilderness and living out of the world, of course he does not know the ways of kings and courts. He means right enough, and I like his outspokenness; but I cannot allow him to interfere in this matter. On the other hand, I will not let Herodias do as she wishes—she would put him to death if she could. I have put him in prison and I will keep him there—for the present—that ought to satisfy her. And at any rate nobody can say that I am careless about religion—I should not hear him

preach if I were ; it is a good deal for one in my position to listen to a man like that."

And the king sighs—"O dear, it is so hard to be good." Hard ! no, Herod—it is not hard—*it is impossible—that way.*

Ah, how many Herods there are about us still. Convinced of the truth, compelled to admit its claims, you will go a long way to meet them. But right across your path lies one thing that you will not give up. Some pleasure ; some gain ; some sin. You will do this and that ; though others may laugh at your scruples. You will come to hear the word—*but you will keep it bound, prisoned, fettered.* You will give in to it on a hundred points, but on one you will gag it. I tell you in the name of the very God you cannot rend the garment of truth and wear it patched and seamed at your own will. It is the Master's robe and is woven throughout. Truth and untruth "can ne'er be equal powers." The want of truth in aught is want of truth in all. The thing can have but one ending. Come see what that end is.

To-day the king celebrates his birthday. Amidst the excitement John lies forgotten in his dungeon. The banquet hall is filled with brilliant company, and Herod splendid in his robes sits amidst the pomp and glitter. And now, to give a new charm to the entertainment, the fair daughter of Herodias comes in to dance before them all. And presently the king leans from his throne and bids the fair dancer ask a gift. With light steps she trips forth

eagerly to her mother to ask what the gift should be. And now, as all eyes are upon her and all listen curious as to the request, the girl, so young, so fair, cries—"Give me here the Baptist's head in a charger."

The company turn eagerly to the king. For a moment he pauses. Back upon him rush all those memories again. That man of God stood by him—could he kill *him*? Then within him clamoured a host of other voices—Herodias; these lords about him; his oath's sake; swept away in his helplessness there seemed no choice. With a face all grief, and with a quivering lip, he bade the executioner go forth and fetch the ghastly gift.

Ah, Herod, you have slain John, and with that same sword you have thrust through all the better part within you—all truth and right are slain for evermore.

So comes the crisis to all who halt between two opinions. We talk of the battle of life as if it were a constant daily struggle. Mere skirmishes and outpost duties there may be frequently: *but it is a matter mostly of some one or two great decisive battles in every man's life.* And when that battle comes to the man who has accustomed himself to trifle with the truth—hearing it; believing it; glowing in the admiration of it; thrilled with beautiful conceptions of it, but stopping short of doing it, seeing it, being it; then are the very joints of his armour broken; thus is the man himself made false to himself. It



must go hard with such an one. Truth through and through us, in all the little words and ways of life—these are the troops and forces trained, disciplined, and armed, with which victory lies when the great day of battle comes. Here, in the presence of the Most High God, here where eternal issues open before us, put it to yourself. You hear the truth: you hear it gladly. Are you true to the truth? Call up again the hindrance—the besetment, the gain, the company, the lust—for which the truth is imprisoned and silenced, and wherein you are traitor to your better self. In upon us let there come the words of the Lord Jesus, so terrible, so solemn, dropping slowly from the gracious lips of Him before whom the mysteries of eternity lay revealed—

*If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. It is better to enter into the kingdom of heaven maimed than having both hands to be cast into hell-fire.*

*If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. It is better for thee to enter into heaven having one eye than having both to be cast into hell-fire.*

### III. HEROD THE SCORNER.

Once more he comes before us. It is a sad scene. He who had heard the truth gladly has made his choice. The months go by—months only—but how altered is the man!

On the dreadful day of the Crucifixion, early in the morning, Jesus has been led bound to Pilate.

The Roman governor has been strangely moved by the Prisoner. His face and bearing seemed as if one of the gods had come down to earth to suffer for men. Awed by His Presence he cannot bring himself to speak the sentence. Amid the clamour of the crowd he catches at the word *Galilee*. That is beyond his jurisdiction, and Pilate will send the case to Herod for settlement. And now the soldiers lead on the prisoner before Herod whilst again the Rulers of the Temple stand and testify against Him. A very different man from Pontius Pilate is this. Cold, flippant, careless—he receives Jesus with a shallow curiosity as if He were some poor wandering magician, who should amuse the King with some show of His skill. Herod looked into that face, but his eyes saw no Divinity therein—he had no heart, no soul, to be touched and moved by the majesty of it and the infinite pity. Jesus was but one who might perhaps amuse him by doing some miracle.

But before Herod Jesus stood with an awful silence. *He answered him not a word*. For the band of soldiers who came to take Him, for Judas as he comes to betray Him, there is a word of greeting. Peter, though he have denied his Lord with curses, has that look of love's appeal. For Pilate there are many earnest words, and for His very murderers there is a prayer. But for Herod—silence only, utter unbroken silence. Not a word fell from those lips; we can think not a glance from that eye. All

that Christ could appeal to was dead—stricken through and through. Reverence, awe, love, truth are dead—the eye that sees anything but the veriest outside of things has been blinded. To Herod this Jesus and His claims are but a matter of sport. So follows the record—*And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him again to Pilate.* This is a thing to be laughed at only ; fit matter for a jest, and nothing more. Such is he who was the earnest hearer of the word.

Ah ! there are hosts of Herods still—men who once heard the truth and heard it gladly, and did many things. But it was not yielded to. They tried to meet its claims half way—then the end came—the truth was first *trifled with*, then *rejected*, then *scorned*. And now if you look for the man whose jests are tipped with Scripture, whose noisiest laughter is at religion, in whom all regard for right and good and truth are dead, dead—you will find him here. The suffering Christ can move no pity ; His majesty compels no reverence. Here it ends. *Herod with his men of war set Him at nought and mocked Him.*

Is there one beset with difficulty, convinced yet scarcely able to obey—longing to do right, yet bound on all sides ? Jesus Christ is not the truth only, but *the truth, the life, the way*. That which He commands He brings us the grace to obey. That which He is He gives us strength and wisdom to

be. In Him is our deliverance. The surrender of the will, the resolute submission of the soul to Him, is the secret of deliverance, the assurance of victory. *As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.*



## XIX.

### *THE STORY OF A PRAYER-MEETING AND WHAT CAME OF IT.*

“But prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.”—ACTS xii. 5.

THIS is a wonderful story of the Power of Prayer. It is weird and tragic as a bit of Old Testament History. Indeed, the name of Herod is to the Christian Church almost all that Ahab is to the Jewish, and Peter comes before us in these earlier chapters of the Acts as another Elijah,—the prophet of fire,—a man from whose lips there leapt the lightnings of God and in whose soul there rolled God’s thunder.

Herod, the grandson of the monster who massacred the Innocents at Bethlehem, sees an opportunity of making favour with the Jews by persecuting the Christians. He stretches out his hand to vex certain of the Church. The poor little bewildered Church at Jerusalem must have been driven to its wits’ end. Stephen had already been stoned to death, and almost all the leading men had been scattered by the persecution that had burst upon them. To us

it is easy to see all this over-ruled for a vast and far-reaching good. The blows of the enemies drove the Christians out amongst the Gentiles—the door was closed at Jerusalem that they might find the opened door in all the world outside. But to these threatened ones there must have seemed no ray of light in all the dreadful gloom. They have come timidly creeping back to Jerusalem, perhaps hoping that the storm had spent its violence. But again they meet, horror-stricken and overwhelmed. The apostle James is cast into prison, and almost immediately after his arrest he is slain with the sword. Now the trembling Church clings about Peter. He seems all that is left to them, the sole pillar of their hope,—if he is taken where can they look? what can they do? Then in upon the little company there bursts a frightened messenger—“Peter is taken—carried off to prison! and Herod is going to put him to death as soon as the Passover is over—at Eastertide”—Easter, the time of the Church’s joy and triumph! Yes; it was true, Peter was gone—marched off between the soldiers, secured within the prison with its great walls and guarded doors—there chained day and night to two soldiers, whilst two others keep guard over him. Escape was hopeless, and his death is already publicly promised by the king. The day, the hour, is fixed; and all the enemies of the Crucified are already celebrating their triumph. With Peter’s death all name, all trace of the Nazarene will pass away.

How the hearts of the Christians must have sunk down within them, sick with helplessness! So crushed, so bewildered, as if everything failed them; all things reeling in the confusion. O these dreadful times, when it seems so hopeless, so useless to do anything more; the conflict is so unequal! Evil is so appalling; so unchecked; so triumphant; and God seems so far away, as if all these things scarcely concerned Him; and hell laughs out its hideous laugh, and points to further troubles coming—troubles so sore and so many and so mighty! What can one do? It seems as if there were nothing for it but to fling up the hands and go down in the black depths of despair. Stephen is slain, and James is slain, and now Peter is taken. The faint-hearted followers are failing them. False brethren are ready to betray them all. Fierce priests are ready to urge the mob to a general massacre of every suspected Christian, with horrors such as made the death of James and even Stephen almost enviable.

Then comes a *but*: a blessed *but*. "*BUT prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.*" Though every other door be shut, this one is ever open to us—and this was their refuge and strength. *Prayer was their element.* We have seen in our day what has been called an attempt to go back to primitive custom in the Church. We can do nothing better, if only we go back far enough. I find no controversy about vestments, no going to law about attitudes and postures and elevation of the



cup. I find no mystery of the mass. I find prayer constant, everywhere. In the house and by the seaside and in the Temple; by night and by day; in upper rooms and house-tops. The Primitive Church was born in a prayer-meeting, and in the prayer-meeting she renewed her strength. The prayer-meeting is the thermometer of the Church—it tests what degree of warmth there is. The prayer-meeting is the barometer of the Church—and truer than some of you think the weather-glass—that points us to showers of blessings or to seasons of drought. Ay, and more than that,—not the measure only, but the means for securing it. The Church's warming apparatus is in the prayer-meeting room. The light that is in the Church comes in that way. A praying Church is a mighty Church; a praying Church is a prosperous Church; a praying Church is a resistless Church. He helps the Church most who sets himself to make the prayer-meeting most largely a success.

But let us turn to this little company again.

Can you think of them, gathered at dead of night, in some upper room with closed doors, and talking in quiet tones for fear of the Jews? If they were men and women like us men and women of to-day, I wonder if they would have prayed at all. It was such an utterly desperate case,—so past all help; I fear the *possibility* of his deliverance would never have occurred to us.

"I don't see any hope whatever," says one; "if

we had only somebody of influence to plead with Herod, but we all are so poor. And then even if he were disposed to spare Peter, he has got all these rulers and Pharisees urging him on ; I see no help." And he shakes his head very sadly.

Then says some simple soul timidly, "I think we had better pray about it." But it was so quietly spoken and so far away from their thoughts that nobody noticed the suggestion.

Then another shakes his head and sighs : "You see Herod has publicly declared his purpose, and the Jews will take care to keep him up to his word. There is no hope."

"No hope," says another bitterly,— "no hope ; you see Peter is inside that iron gate and those stone walls. He couldn't possibly get through *them*. And then chained day and night to the soldiers and watched by the sentries ! Poor Peter ! there is not a chance for him."

"I think we had better pray," says the simple soul again, more urgently.

"Really, brother, do be *practical* ! Whatever can prayer do in a case like this ?" ask they all impatiently.

"What can it not do ?" says the simple soul.

"Ah, but you see God works according to law," says another very solemnly. *That* silences them all. The simple soul doesn't know what law means, most likely none of them do. They only think of it as something very dreadful indeed that shut Heaven's

door and left poor Peter hopelessly in prison. And they sigh all round and shake their heads dolefully. And so poor Peter might have perished and the Church have died out,—all because God works by laws !

But now one knocks at the door—a familiar knock, the kind of knock that told of an earnest and resolute man. “Ah, here is Brother Faith,” says the simple soul, looking up brightly.

“Well,” says Faith, “what are you going to do ?”

Nobody speaks,—for nobody has anything to say ; and the simple soul is content to be quiet now Faith is come.

“Have *you* got anything to propose ?” at last one asks doubtfully.

“Yes,” Faith answers almost cheerily, “I have—I happen to know One Who has great influence with Herod, and could get him to change his mind about this matter. And besides that, He has the key of that iron door, and He can open it. And as for the soldiers, they are bound to do His bidding. He can loose the chains and fetch Peter out of prison and bring him right here in our midst. I think we had better speak to Him.”

“*Who* can do that but Cæsar ?” they ask in a tone of disappointment. “And however are *we* to get at Cæsar ? Besides, to-morrow poor Peter is to die, and there is no time to communicate with him.”

“No,” says Faith, “I don’t mean Cæsar ; I mean One here in Jerusalem.”

"Well, but how can we get at Him?" objects another, "now at the dead of night? And what influence have we got with Him either?"

"We can get at Him without any trouble," says Faith; "and as for influence, He has bidden us come to Him when we are in trouble, and has pledged Himself to help us always,—I mean *our Father in Heaven.*"

"But God works according to law, you know," says one; and the simple soul looks up sadly, wondering what Faith will say to that.

"True," says Faith, "and isn't this a law—a mighty, deep, abiding law? *that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.* And is not this a law?—that *if we know how to give good gifts unto our children, our Father shall much more know how to give good gifts to them that ask Him.* I believe in law," says Faith, "but I believe at the back of all law, its source and strength, is the heart of our Father God. He *can* hear us and He *can* help us. And He *will*. Let us pray." And without more ado Faith knelt down, and one by one all followed and they began to pray.

O Faith! verily thou hast logic and philosophy and common-sense and the promises and everything on thy side,—for thou hast God.

Now as the little company begin to pray, let us draw near and join them. Think again of their helplessness,—how it seemed as if their enemies

were going to ride roughshod over them, as if evil were so enthroned and girt about with might that it is no good trying to fight against it. Ah, what a refuge and strength it is to go up out of the confusion into the Presence of the King of kings,—the Lord of all power and might. What a blessedness to lose in Him the weary sense of helplessness; to get away from themselves and their weakness, and to stay themselves on Omnipotence. In this presence hope springs up again. Truth and right and goodness are not deserted,—they are not left to be the prey of the Evil One. God, the living God, is with them. How strong are they now! How they begin to look down upon Herod and all his men of war. What were bolts and bars to such a God as theirs? O blessed, thrice blessed, is he who knows what it is to find in God such a refuge and strength,—such a present help in trouble!

As they pray on they get to the very heart of God. They come up to the Holy Hill of Zion by way of the Cross, and they meet not only with the infinitely High and Holy and Mighty—lo! their own Faithful Redeemer bendeth over them in tenderest pity and eagerness to help. Was not this poor trembling Church the very chosen, the Bride of God's dear Son, for whom He had lain down His life? What then? If God had given His Son for their sakes, would He, could He, withhold His help? How bold faith grows as it asks,—how it urges its plea,—“I will not let Thee go except Thou bless

me." It goes leaping to higher heights,—from asking to expecting, and from expecting to claiming. O Herod! you cannot succeed against this,—in vain all your plans and purposes,—in vain your wretched promises,—iron gates and prison doors and guard of soldiers, all must fail. This little company has got hold of Omnipotence. And lo! as they pleaded there fell upon them a holy hush as if God passed by, and the word was spoken to the heart—"Thy prayer is heard,"—and prayer was turned to praise.

And now, leaving the little company to their prayer-meeting, let us go forth to see how it fares with Peter. We pass along the quiet streets until we reach the great prison gates, massive and guarded. Then on past the first and second ward, with posted sentinels who watch the passages through all the night. And here is Peter's cell, with the soldiers at the door; and within Peter himself,—chained by heavy fetters to the soldiers who lie on either side of him. Poor Peter! the sentence has gone out that to-morrow he must die,—die amidst every condition that should afford his enemies a gloating triumph; and amidst circumstances that should seem like a death-blow to the Church of his blessed Master. Little wonder if amidst those harsh discomforts we find him cast down and afraid, beset with grief and fear. But look, here he lies, the sandals cast off from his feet, his girdle loosened, and he himself *asleep*.

Well, what else should he be doing ? Of old he slept because the flesh was weak ; now he sleeps because his faith is strong. Ah, it is the very climax of faith when it has learnt to sleep. Death stands at the door, but what of that ? The God Whom he serves is able to deliver out of Herod's hand. God breathed His own good-night about His faithful servant, and gave His beloved sleep.

Soul, has thy faith learnt to sleep ? Many a man can fight the good fight of faith, who cannot sleep the good sleep of faith. To hand one's self and all things right over into the sure and blessed keeping of our Father, and then to be untroubled though all the pack of hell be loosed and clamouring at the door, that is a triumph indeed. Then is the prison floor a couch that the restless Herod might envy. Sleep on, thou saint of God ; sleep on, and dream of the morrow, thy coronation day.

Now suddenly the dungeon is illuminated as with the glory of the Lord. Peter's dreams are disturbed—is the dreadful day here, and do the soldiers rouse him for his death ? “ Rise up quickly.” Then Peter saw the angel of the Lord, he felt the fetters loosened, and they fell noiselessly to the ground ; and forth he went, past the soldiers, and past the gate, and through the street. Then the angel was gone, and Peter stood under the starry heavens—free. At first his thoughts went up to God to thank Him for His great deliverance. Then his thoughts went away to the little company that had met in prayer



for him. He hurried to the house of Mary the mother of John. *And he found the door shut!* The dungeon door was opened; the prison gate fell back before him; but here were they, praying that Peter might be fetched out of prison, and they had forgotten to leave their own front door on the latch for him. The only place that Peter found impassable was the house of his friends! Is it not often so—that we have more faith than expectation? We have confidence in God, but we forget to look out for the answer to our prayer. Have we not heard of the little maiden who when the church met to pray for rain took her big umbrella with her; and when the congregation came out to find their prayers answered, they almost forgot to be thankful in their concern about their dresses and bonnets, whilst she went safely sheltered on her way? When you begin to pray, let faith set the door of expectation open. It is a parable with many lessons for all of us,—the little company upstairs praying that Peter might be released; and all the time Peter is standing outside and cannot come in, because there is nobody to open the door for him. So is it that many go on praying for forgiveness of sin, and they forget to go to the door to see if the Saviour is there. Many are praying for the peace and joy of the indwelling Christ, and lo! He Himself is standing without knocking and waiting if they would but open unto Him and let Him come in.

Poor Peter! it seemed a cold reception for him,

standing there and knocking thus. And the more earnestly and fervently they prayed, the less likely they were to hear him. He knocks again, and louder. And the damsel Rhoda, hearing some one, creeps timidly to listen. They were times of peril, and all kinds of dreadful things might happen; and fearfully she asked who it was. *It was Peter.* And in very joy, without staying to open the door, she ran in and carried the good tidings,—“*Peter is come.*”

“Nonsense,” said one, “you are mad.” Ah, they were a little like us of to-day, it seems.

“But I am sure it is he: I heard his voice,” persisted the damsel.

Then said one and another rather frightened,—“*It is his ghost.*”

It is wonderful what people will believe in sooner than believe in answers to prayer.

Then the company crept timidly to the door. Yes, there was Peter himself, and he told them how the Lord had sent an angel and delivered him.

Then I can think they saw why this mystery of Peter’s imprisonment had been permitted,—that they might prove the mighty power of prayer. And Peter went forth beyond the reach of Herod. But a little time after, Herod himself, in all his splendour, whilst yet the flattery of the people rang in his ears, was smitten by the angel of the Lord and gave up the ghost.

*Do let us believe in God.* And if we believe at all

let there be no *limit to our faith*, since there is no limit to the power and goodness of our God. We have access to the same God; let us make much use of it. If Herod be dead, his successors are still very much alive. There are many rulers of public opinion who do stretch out their hands to vex the Church. Others are there whose lust hates that which condemns their indulgence. Our power to triumph over our foes is in our power to pray. O for men and women who will stir themselves to take hold of God and to plead with Him! What hosts are there who lie away from the reach of the Gospel, high and low: those whose lives are given up to luxurious self-indulgence, and those who are utterly brutal and degraded? They seem to be behind walls and gates; altogether beyond our reach; and bound by the chains of evil. How can we get at them? As the little company got at Peter,—*by the power of prayer*. Pray, my brother, my sister—pray for the drunkards; pray for the lustful; pray for the ungodly. Pick out individual cases for which to pray. Be definite and persistent and expectant.

Amongst us there are old besetting sins, that are riveted upon wrist and ankle, binding men and women in a miserable bondage, making them useless to the Church,—avarice, ill-temper, worldliness, lukewarmness, prejudice, pride. There are thousands who might be standing proclaiming the Word of the Lord and casting out devils in the name of Jesus Christ, if only their fetters were broken and their

prison doors were opened; men and women who might be rendering splendid service for Christ, if only they were wholly given up to Him. Their gold is under lock and key, and it wants a strong angel of the Lord to loosen it. They are shut up in an inner dungeon of indifference or laziness, bound by the opinion of those about them, as Peter was by the chains of the soldiers. What can we do? One thing—and if that be well done we shall triumph. *Pray.* Get little companies of Christians in one another's houses to pray. Have little praying parties: have praying "at homes." God is ready to repeat the miracles of His grace to-day if the Church has but faith to ask for them. He can fetch the prisoned ones out of their dungeons. Let there be but continual prayer, and assuredly there shall be continual triumph. Let but prayer be made without ceasing of the Church unto God; and rulers shall be powerless for mischief, and prison doors shall be opened, and again it shall be recorded,—  
*"The word of God grew and multiplied."*



## XX.

### *THE TWO-FOLD REST.*

“I will give you rest.”—MATTHEW xi. 28.

“Ye shall find rest.”—MATTHEW xi. 29.

#### PART I.—THE REST GIVEN.

HERE is a two-fold rest—a rest that is *given*, and a rest that is *found*. Both are in Jesus, in Jesus only; but the two are very different, and differently obtained.

The first is rest by what Christ takes off our shoulders and carries for us. “Come unto Me,” saith He, “all ye that labour and are heavy laden.” That rest is ours simply by coming to Him. It is not dependent upon our learning or upon our service, but only upon our coming. That rest is a gift, complete and secured alike to all who come to Him; then is it ours at once and as fully as it ever can be. All true Christians have that rest.

But few have the second. That is not given—it is to be *found*. That is for those who enter Christ’s school and learn of Him; who go into Christ’s service and work for Him. And it is theirs more

and more as they go on learning and serving. "Learn of Me," saith He. "Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." This is rest by a yoke put on, as the other is rest by a yoke put off.

At the outset, it is very needful for us to hear these words aright ; and that can only be by coming to Him Who spake them at the first. Dried fruits may keep something of their flavour, but they lose the bloom, and shape, and beauty ; they lack all the surroundings of foliage and garden wealth, and the glory of the skies beneath which they grow. Alas ! how shrivelled and hard is this great utterance as it falls from our lips. That which no man could ever have thought, any man may well hesitate to utter. Only the great Heart that held the world could have spoken these words ; and only He can speak them still. Think of Him looking forth upon all the burdened and heavy-laden, conscious that in Him there is that which meets the want of the whole world. Many men in every age have clamoured fiercely for the world's heeding, and have cried aloud : "Come unto me, and I will give you happiness, honour, excitement, splendour, wealth, health." How much more perfect was His knowledge of the world's need Who bent over it and said : "*I will give you rest.*" It is good to think that once in the midst of men there stood One Who spake thus. But it is better still to think that He stands in *our* midst and speaks thus *now*. This "Come

unto Me," implies a present and approachable Christ : Christ within reach of me and within my reach. Those eyes that search all secrets, so full of tenderest pity, look on thee and me, and as if there were no other to be helped He saith to us, *I will give you rest.* It shall avail us nothing to hear a thousand sermons about these words, no matter how splendid ; the blessedness is ours only as *we come to Him.* We cannot come in the wrong way if we do but come—with fearful step, groping in blindness, only coming, the gift is ours. At His feet these words fall from His lips like healing balm, like the great hush of His authority over the winds and waves. *Come unto Me*—blessed be God, it is not far to go. It is to set thought and heart upon Him, to look up saying, "Here am I, Lord,—for Thou didst call me, and I am come." Strange, indeed, is it that this is ever the last thing we do—coming right away to Jesus. We go anywhere and to anything sooner than alone to Him ; and yet nothing else can avail us. Salvation is too great a work for any short of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself ; and the Saviour is too eager for our help to entrust it to other hands. *Come unto ME.*

*I will*—the music grows richer and sweeter with every note. Stay yourself upon that word. Venture your all for eternity upon it. It is fixed and unalterable. Now can we hold Him by this truth. Now is it no more a matter in which my Master



hath any choice. By that "I will" He hath bound Himself, and bound Himself to me. I will *give*. It is wholly without condition. There is here nothing about learning of Him or taking His yoke ; nothing even about repentance and faith and feeling.

But are they not needful ?

Of course they are, and *because they are needful they shall be given with the gift*. My Master doth not cheat me by setting the gift on the pinnacle of the Temple, and promising it with much show of grace if I can but get it. Never, never. He gives repentance, faith, feeling—all that can make the gift most gracious and most complete His bounty delights to bestow.

*And now do you ask, What is the rest?* Well, different persons will set most store upon different aspects of it, and the rest is fullest and completest where most of all the burden of life presses. To some it is above all else *rest from the mystery, the loneliness, the burden of life*. In Jesus Christ there is the revelation of a Love in which we rest. God's love is ours—the rest and blessedness as of a little wearied child that hath found again the mother's arms and rests against her heart. God's great love underlies and commences as well as over-arches and completes every other gift that Christ gives to us. Life is, indeed, a burden of mystery. Here are we, so shaped by circumstances, and yet with such possibilities for good or evil within us ; so hemmed in by the present, and yet with eternity lying about

us ; so dependent upon this world, and yet ever feeling its wretched insufficiency ; at times longing to be holy, and yet with such temptations and impulses to evil ; so weak, and yet with desires, ambitions, longings that are infinite. Life is a thing of distractions. Earth holds us, though Heaven beckons and Death threatens, and we alternately hug the world and hate it ; we sigh for Heaven, and then despise it ; we dread Death, yet play with it. And Jesus Christ looks forth pitifully upon us, and bids us come unto Him. In Him life loses all its loneliness. With us everywhere and in everything there is an abiding Presence—helpful, comforting, delivering. God is no more only the great Creator afar off, but my Father, stooping to take my hand, teaching me that I am dear, unutterably dear to His heart ; that for me He hath most gracious and most glorious purposes ; and all the way of life is but the path in which He is leading me on to truer blessedness ; developing and ennobling me. The feverish worry and over-eagerness of life fall from our shoulders as we rest in His care. The fierce and hungry desires that went out after the world are uplifted, and now find in Him their rest and satisfaction. There is deep, true, blessed rest in the revelation of the Father.

Then out of this infinite love there comes the next step in our rest. Behind us there is a past that we cannot conceal ; that awful procession of deeds and words and wishes : and all the life's influence

following us. A past which cannot be left behind ; a burden that grows each day. No skill, no desperate effort can loosen the knots. In our midst there standeth One Who saith : "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." *How* we need not stay to understand, rejoicing in the fact that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins. Blessed be God, there are thousands who do know what it is to come to Him ! One touch of that Hand, and the burden is gone. Cast behind God's back ;—buried in the depth of the sea ;—remembered against us no more for ever ;—removed from us as far as the East is from the West,—this is ours in Christ Jesus. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Think of the disciples tossed in the storm upon the lake, when the great waves surged about the little craft ; hung over them in awful threatening, crouched to spring upon them again, then leapt roaring and hissing as if impatient for their prey. Before, behind, above, beneath the cruel waters that gathered in their strength against them. Then suddenly He came, with outstretched Hand. *Be still*—and there was a great calm ; and the starry heaven looked down upon the sleeping sea. Think not that His Power and Love have spent themselves—nay indeed, no more than His sun has spent its light and heat. Open the ear of the heart ; He speaks now, to you—*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

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*And for the future, as from the past, He is our peace.* Born of God, we are now of His family and household. If children, then heirs ; being trained and fitted for a high estate, until we are of age and enter upon our great inheritance. So do we stand. About us the ceaseless, all-controlling love of God ; behind us a past in which all condemnation is for ever hushed ; before us, growing nearer and clearer, the sunny distance of the Father's house. Believing, we have entered into rest.

Will *you* have it all—a *gift, a gift for you* ? Some time since, as I was stepping into the train at Newcastle, a gentleman came up to me and said he was going my way, and if I did not object he would take his seat in the same compartment, as he had been wanting to see me. I was very glad to have his company. He was good enough to say that he had met with a story a little while before which he thought might serve me. A friend of his, living some few miles from Newcastle, was walking along a railway siding going from the main line to a colliery, when he looked down upon a roughly-built cottage, and noticed that the daylight showed through the loose tiles on the roof. He wondered if anybody could be living in a place that appeared so cheerless, and coming round to the front he found an old woman and her grown-up daughter. At once he said within himself that he would see the place was made more comfortable before the winter came, and then hurried on his way. But the good

purpose was forgotten, and he never thought of the place again until one morning some few weeks after he drew up his blind and looked out to find two or three inches of snow on the ground. At once his heart smote him for his forgetfulness. He had that day to go to Newcastle, and it occurred to him that at any rate a pair of blankets would do something towards adding to the comfort of the couple. He reached his house with the big brown-paper parcel, and thought he would have the pleasure of taking them himself. As he passed the window the old woman was looking out, and he held up the parcel, thinking she would understand that he was bringing something for her. But she only frowned angrily and shook her head. He opened the door; when the old woman bade him angrily begone; she did not want to *buy* any of his goods, she said, and slammed the door against him. "Why," he said, "*she thinks I want to sell them!* No wonder she is so vexed, needing them so badly. I must make her understand that it is a gift." He opened the door again and got in. More fiercely than ever she bade him begone. He saw that she was stone deaf, and that her daughter was not at home. What could he do? To leave the parcel would only be to have it flung after him in the snow.

"I will show her what it is," he said to himself, "perhaps she will understand then," and he untied the parcel.

But the sight of the warm blankets only made

her more conscious of her need and her poverty, and she turned away indignantly. "Why don't you go away? I have told you I don't want them."

What could he do? He took one out and held it up full length and breadth, and smiled and nodded his head, but it seemed only like the insinuating wiles of some resolute peddler, and aggravated her the more.

"Why don't you go away when I tell you?" she cried.

Then yet another effort suggested itself. Taking the blanket he threw it right round her and burst into a hearty laugh.

Then the meaning of it all flashed upon her. Looking up, almost afraid to ask the question, she asked: "*For me?*" He nodded his head and smiled.

"*A gift?*" she asked again, her hope growing bolder. Again he nodded his head.

"*A gift for me!*" she repeated to herself. She stroked it with her hands and felt the warmth of it, then laughed and cried for very joy; she grasped his hands, and thanked him with all her heart, whilst the tears streamed down her wrinkled cheeks.

Alas that our blessed Master should have such trouble to force His gifts upon us! Alas that we are so deaf, so blind to His great love! *I will give you rest*, saith He. Take it. Wrap it about you. Rest in it with adoring gratitude. *A gift—a gift for me!*



## XXI.

### THE TWO-FOLD REST.

“I will give you rest.”—MATTHEW xi. 28.

“Ye shall find rest.”—MATTHEW xi. 29.

#### PART II.—THE REST FOUND.

WE have already spoken of the rest *given*—complete and absolute; ours as fully and freely the moment we come to Jesus as ever it can be ours. We may go on for ever finding a greater fulness in the gift, but it can never be more perfectly our own. Rest by the revelation of the Father; rest by the forgiveness of sin; rest by the promised inheritance of the future. This must ever be accepted as a gift. We cannot buy it by any merit; we cannot earn it by any service. And because this must ever come first, let us once more rejoice to make it our own. Once more we would have the sweetness of this music—*Come unto Me*. Our thoughts and hearts go forth to greet Him. *I will give you rest*. Let His great love inspire our boldness. Now put in your claim: “Lord Jesus, I am come for the gift which Thou hast graciously promised.” There are but two



concerned in the matter, and they are never far apart—*ye* and *Me*; the heavy-laden soul and the meek and lowly Jesus. Within reach of His presence, with Him held and bound to us by His word, it is our own fault if we take another step with the burden on our shoulder. He does not specify the burden, or we should every one of us think that ours was certainly not the one described. It may be a burden of grief that we cannot grieve for our sins. It may be a burden of longing that we could long for Him. It may be the burden of a stupid dulness and deadness; a hateful indifference. It may be a burden of indecision; a burden of fickleness. Sometimes the heaviest burden that is borne is the burden of *no* burden; the load that breaks the heart is because the heart is not heavy laden. It may be a vague indefinite want, too subtle for words; a thing we are conscious of like a mist,—we try to grasp it—then it is gone. Well, whatever the burden, the rest is promised to *you*. O for the power to utter this *Come, COME, COME* with His resistless grace, with His own sweet tenderness. He Whose pitiful Face bends over you, Who searcheth you through, speaks now to you as if there were no other—"Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."

But for those who have found this rest there remaineth yet another rest that is not a gift. It is a deeper, fuller, soul rest: a satisfaction of the heart. And this rest is to be found only in learning of Him, and in His service. *Learn of Me, for I am*

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*meek and lowly in heart: Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest.*

Learn of Me. Not about Jesus only, but learn from Him. Let Him be the Teacher. No two things are so much alike and yet so far off as these two—*about* Him and *of* Him. There are three things we can do when we are going to learn.

*We can look at ourselves.* And just think how dull and stupid we are; how very much unlike all the clever and learned people about us; and we can sigh and fret and wish that we were only gifted and brilliant. Some people do that, and think it is religion—a sort of airing and exercising their modesty! Of all follies, surely there is none greater than that.

Or, instead of looking at ourselves, we may *look at the lesson.* We may think how hard it is, and frighten our silly selves, and puzzle our poor brains over imaginary difficulties until we just give up in despair. And day after day we may do that, sighing and wishing that we could learn, yet never trying because it looks so hard. Well, some people do that, too, and call it their religion! Looking up at what they want to be, and sighing that it is so hard; and then beginning the process again next time they think of it.

The third way open to us is *to think of the Teacher.* And that is the way to get all we want. You cannot make yourself stronger by thinking about your weakness. Take it for granted that you are

the very dullest and stupidest soul that ever was or ever can be. It *may* be true. Take it for granted that yours is the hardest and most perplexing lesson that ever any poor child sat down to learn. Most likely it is not—but do not discuss it any more. Let all that lead on to this conclusion: *If ever I learn anything I shall need a very clever teacher.* And then look up to see what kind of a Teacher you have. Ah! then do all difficulties vanish. “LEARN OF ME,” saith He, “FOR I AM MEEK AND LOWLY IN HEART.”

Do you notice that Christ does not describe *our* character, but *He sets Himself before us.* He speaks, not of what is on our shoulder, but of what is in His heart. *I am meek and lowly.* Was there ever yet any other teacher who set this forth as his qualification? The very words have been rescued and redeemed from their low estate by Jesus Christ's use of them. Until He came they meant something mean and contemptible. Meekness and lowliness were not virtues, but vices—qualities that moved men's scorn until Jesus Christ came to reveal their beauty.

Teachers and professors generally set their many titles after their names to proclaim their greatness and learning. But our Master's claim to be *our* Teacher is that He does not seek the brilliant and splendid scholars who promise great things, and who can do without much help. He comes seeking the dull scholars, the scholars who think that they will never get on. “*I am meek and lowly in heart.*” It

is as if He said, "I do not lose My temper with those who are slow and backward. I do not get angry with those who forget, and who need to learn the same thing again and yet again. I am not sharp and hasty. I can bear with failure. Come and learn of Me."

Very wonderful is it to associate these words with the outburst of Christ's joy which precedes them. "*I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and* HAST REVEALED THEM UNTO BABES. . . . *All things are delivered unto Me of My Father. . . . Come unto Me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me.*"

*Thou hast revealed these things unto babes.* It is good to remember that the great feats and achievements of our life are learnt without any lessons, without any schools, without any professors. We learn to eat and drink, to talk, to walk, to call things by their names, not as the result of lessons. They come to us without any teacher. Think of some great German professor, master of a score of mysterious matters, author of a dozen prodigiously learned books, and now he sits down to learn this troublesome English language, with its lawlessness of pronunciation. And as he blunders over it, growing angry at such unreasonable variations, think how little it ever cost *us*. The foreigners' lips and teeth and tongue have to be drilled to express some of our combinations, and the memory is piled with

words like *cough* and *plough*, and *dough* and *enough*. And we never remember any difficulty! Of course not, you say; it is our mother tongue. Ah, blessed "of course"—*it was revealed unto the babe*. That which the German professor finds so difficult we learnt without any trouble. It came to us—how? By lying in the mother's arms, by looking into the mother's face, by watching the mother's lips. *Thou hast revealed these things unto babes*.

These sublime things—the speech of heaven, the love of the Father, the mystery of trust, the mind which is in Christ, the secrets of the true and blessed life, are not learned by hard lessons; they cannot be taught by lecturers and professors, we must come to Jesus and *learn of Him*. It is by listening to Him that we learn to talk; by resting on His love we learn to grow; by holding His hand we learn to walk; to come unto Him and tarry with Him is to learn, and yet is it to forget the difficulty of the lesson in the patience and skill of the Teacher. The Master is lost in the Friend, and the lesson is all love. So do we learn of Him, not by struggling to understand great mysteries, not by desperate efforts, but looking at Him, until by the law of imitating what we love we are changed by beholding; by trying to please Him in all things; by trying?—nay, the memory so treasures the example that effort is gone—by speaking as He speaks, by thinking as He thinks, by feeling as He feels, by willing as He wills. Thus this fuller rest begins.

*Then this rest is ours by service.* "Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." How do we read these words? Is the picture that of the Lord standing as a gracious and gentle Master, with the staff of His authority in His hand, to guide rather than smite; whilst He points to the yoke as the implement of service, and invites us to come and put our neck beneath it; and then that we two may go on together through life, having one will, one work, one way? That is blessed indeed; and that is rest. Rest in submission, rest in glad surrender and steadfast obedience. It is indeed soul-rest when His will and our will are one; when He takes the control of our life, and with it the responsibility, and we seek only to please Him. This is rest indeed—to find the fever of earth's ambitions die out of the blood; to find the clamouring claimants for our service silenced and rebuked by the Blessed Lord, Who only knows us, and Who alone satisfies us; to find duty growing into a delight, the yoke made "sweet" for us, as early translators delighted to render it, lined with the soft velvet of His loving-kindness; to prove the paths by which He leads us pleasantness; to have no choice but His will, and no desire but His service—this is rest, indeed.

But this, all this, is by no means the picture which we may set before us. *A yoke is never made for one.* The picture is of our Blessed Master standing with His neck beneath the yoke of service; and the other side is empty. "Soul," saith He, "wilt thou take

this place by Me, and put thy neck beneath My yoke? Then thou shalt find rest." Then is that very yoke the bond of our union and communion. Then, indeed, is life but one work, one way, one will. He gently quickening my laggard steps, and as gently restraining my over-eagerness; and I, by my presence, ministering to my Lord—His company, His yoke-fellow, His comfort, and His rest. This is the fulness of the blessed rest which He seeks to bestow.

Yet is not this all. I had finished my sermon once, and ended here, when a good man came to me and said: "I wish I had known what you were going to preach about. I could have told you something."

"Well, my friend," I said, "it is very good of you. May I not have it still?"

"Do you know why His yoke is light, sir? If not, I think I can tell you."

"Well, because the good Lord helps us to carry it, I suppose."

"No, sir," he explained, shaking his head; "I think I know better than that. You see when I was a boy at home, I used to drive the oxen in my father's yoke. And the yoke was never made to balance, sir, as you said." (I had referred to the Greek word. But how much better it was to know the real thing.)

He went on triumphantly: "Father's yokes were always made *heavier one side than the other*. Then,



you see, we should put a weak bullock in alongside of a strong bullock, and the light end would come on the weak bullock, because the stronger one had the heavy part of it on his shoulder."

Then his face lit up as he said: "That is why the yoke is easy and the burden is light; because the Lord's yoke is made after the same pattern, *and the heavy end is upon His shoulder.*"

*So shall ye find rest to your soul.*



## XXII.

### *THE HOPEFULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST.*

“He shall not fail nor be discouraged.”—ISAIAH xlii. 4.

WHAT a gloriously hopeful book the Bible is ! Our God is the God of Hope ; and the Bible is the Book of Hope—the book of the world’s hope. What a triumphant hope runs through it, like the river of God brimming up into light and music at the gates of Paradise and ever swelling until it finds its fulness in the Book of the Revelation ! *The God of Hope*—is a title not often thought of, and the claims to the title may be easily overlooked. It is good to dwell upon the sublime manifestations of hope that meet us again and again in the Word of God. Look at it at the Fall. The words have but just fallen like the benediction of God upon the work of His hands —“*It is very good*”—when there comes the misery of man’s disobedience, the beginning of earth’s anguish and curse. Yet even here the angel of hope can speak the promise of victory—“The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head”—the curse should be undone, and Paradise restored. And lo ! as the sorrowful parents come forth, Peace is left

behind, and Joy has fled back to Heaven, yet Hope folded her wings, and spake like her Lord: "I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee."

See it again as the little company step forth from the Ark. The world has been swept away by the waters of destruction as if past all remedy; yet first to greet them is the angel of Hope, and the assurance is given that summer and winter, seedtime and harvest shall never fail: and the rainbow—very emblem of Hope, heaven's sunshine mingling with earth's tears—spans the sky.

See it again in the story of Joshua. Though Israel has wandered grumbling for forty years in the wilderness, though Moses is dead, wearied with their perverseness, yet turn to the first chapter and see what a brave hope rings through it all: "Be of good courage. Fear not. Only be . . . very courageous. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life."

Yet more wonderful, perhaps most wonderful of all, is it to pass from the awful hour of the Crucifixion, when Heaven was hidden in darkness, and Heli's triumph seemed all unhindered and unproved, to the rapturous hope that fills the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It is to pass from horrid night with ghastly terrors to the glory of the fullest noon, to compare the language of the disciples at the two stages. Think of the disciples who went on their dreary way to Emmaus, making their sad communications one to another, and turning to the

Unknown One who had joined them. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass? . . . how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him? But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." Pass from that to the defiant gladness of the disciples but a little later—Acts iv. 23-30: "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth and the sea and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? . . . For of a truth against Thy Holy Child Jesus Whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word. . . . And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness."

Again and again in the Epistles is there this rapturous outburst of hope; until it finds its glorious

consummation in the Book of Revelation, and all the universe rings with the Hallelujah Chorus.

Now if we are to be true servants of God and disciples of Jesus Christ we must be partakers of this glowing hopefulness. To be discouraged is to fail. To hope is to be strong. The prayer of St. Paul for the Christians in Rome we need often offer for ourselves. *Now the God of Hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.* This strong hope is essential to the successful worker. The good soldier of Jesus has for his helmet the hope of salvation. God can do wonders with very feeble instruments, but I do not know that God ever did anything with doleful men or women—except perhaps in the case of Jonah, and that is much more of a warning than an encouragement. The frightened souls who faint sooner than draw a sword are not worth much to God or man. These doleful counsellors who would have you never wet your feet until you have learned to swim, are a greater hindrance to the Church of God than the forces of the enemy outside. If you would do any good in the world you must carry a brave heart and cheery courage. Do not think of hope as wholly a matter of temperament, nature, disposition. The Spirit of God comes to impart this gift; and the best remedy for gloomy doubts is a baptism of the Holy Ghost. Hope grows strong as it feeds upon the promises. When the sun shines and the south winds blow I have seen

the old thornbush covered with dainty blossoms scenting all the air ; and the very bramble begins to show some signs of life and promise of fruit. Pray for hope. " That ye may *abound* in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." Our hope is to overflow. Listen to St. Paul on board the ship when the cargo is cast overboard, and the tackling loosed, and all hope of safety is gone ; yet with what brave gladness he cries : " Sirs, be of good cheer. There shall be no loss of any man's life among you." Peace and Joy and Hope—it is a blessed trinity. Peace that hushes all with holy calm. Joy that flows over into song. Hope that points ever onward and upward and tells of yet better things to be. Of every one of us this word should be true—*He shall not fail nor be discouraged*. Trust in God and be infallible. Trust in God, and carry ever a sunny hope that nothing can destroy and nothing dim.

*The hope of the world is in Jesus Christ.* It is well to begin this chapter a little farther back, at the twenty-eighth verse of the previous chapter. The Most High God speaks : " I beheld, and there was no man ; even among them, and there was no counsellor, that, when I asked of them, could answer a word. Behold, they are all vanity ; their works are nothing : their molten images are wind and confusion."

Man cannot find within himself the remedy for the ills of humanity. What can the gospels of the day—the gospels of *a* day—do for either the masses

or the classes? Turn to the dirty, the drunken, the dishonest. Carry them your gospel of culture, of education, of refinement. Transform them if you can from the masses into the classes—put grammar into their mouths, and finery upon their shoulders, and luxury upon their walls. Have you finished? How are you going to cast out the devils of pride: of lust: of selfishness? Is it not amongst these very cultured classes that you have such scenes of debauchery in the West End of London as the East End knows nothing about? Your culture does not make men lowly, and loving, and brotherly, and Christlike. We cannot cast out these devils. We either shut our eyes and ears to it all: or else we give in to it, and actually legislate for its protection. Hope for humanity cannot come from man.

But when all is black and hopeless there is another *Behold*. The rosy morning fills the sky: *Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in Whom My soul delighteth: I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth.*

The hope of God is in Him Whom He hath appointed the Saviour of the world. And our hope is in beholding Him. *Behold—behold*—if that vision grow dim our hearts melt and our hands go down—



*behold Him.* Let it be our watchword. There is but one fitness for the life of every day : and for all service for God this is our strength and inspiration—a clear vision of our glorious Captain. As we go along the streets, the vice that flaunts, the drunkenness that reels, the want and misery that meet us everywhere ; the suffering little children ; the crowded streets that stretch away on every side ; the ceaseless roll and din of the five-millioned city—it must madden us with despair if we can only turn to ourselves for help—if we wait for legislation, or for public indignation. *Behold, behold*—the Son of God is come down into the midst of our humanity, taking upon Himself its sins and sorrows. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged.* Then the sick heart is made whole again : then the soul can breathe once more. There is God's hope for the world and it may well be ours. Let our coming together be ever a new beholding of Him—Jesus Christ, the Almighty Saviour, the gracious and pitiful Brother of all. Through Him we are more than conquerors. Here is the unfailing spring of our hope—*He shall not fail nor be discouraged.*

Let us look at this hope of our Saviour. It is broad based, and its foundation is deep. The tower of His confidence stands four square to all the winds of Heaven and all the blasts of Hell.

*It is the hope of One Who knows the needs of humanity.* There is a shallow hope that thinks it can heal men's wounds by hiding them ; or that

they can banish ill by giving it some scientific name which quite satisfies everybody—the man who can pronounce such a word must be clever enough for everything. Or it softens the misery by some sweet phrase, lispingly spoken, and the dreadfulness of it all is charmed. Alas, I have walked through “Rosemary Lane” and “Saffron Hill” and found that the name did bring no sweet odours and no fair scenes. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Has it not sometimes seemed to each one of us unutterably and infinitely sad that God should have to endure the sin of our own heart? Are there not times when it has driven us to God depressed, overwhelmed, well-nigh despairingly: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.” But let the mind go on to think of the sin about us—the thousand shapes of ill that throng and crowd each life; the hidden sins; the sins of our great cities. Think of the sins of the past too, the forms of brutality that Christianity has softened; the horrors that Christianity has made impossible; the sins of all the nations—all these faced the Lord Jesus Christ as He came forth to His great work—the *sin of the world*. He knows it all as none else can ever know it—He Who was the naked conscience of the world, and upon Whom was laid the iniquity of us all. Yet of Him it is written: *He shall not fail nor be discouraged.*



## XXIII.

### *THE HOPEFULNESS OF JESUS CHRIST.*

“He shall not fail nor be discouraged.”—ISAIAH xlii. 4.

WE have seen already that this was the hope of One Who had a right estimate of the *needs of humanity*. He knows as no other ever knew the exceeding sinfulness of sin ; He sees its depths ; its darkness ; its force and subtlety ; its world-wide extent, its endless forms and methods : yet of Him beholding the sin of the whole world it is written : He shall not fail nor be discouraged. Let us *Behold Him*. Alas, our heart doth despair at the knowledge of itself ; and is withered utterly at the thought of the sin about us. But look up. *Behold Him*. Let our hope be rooted in Him that we may abound in hope.

Consider further, that this is *the hope of One Who has a most lofty ideal*. There is a shallow hope that is easily able to fulfil itself by bringing down the ideal of life until it fits the case. If you would have men what they should be, it is easily done—bring down what they should be to the level of what they are. Love may afford to be blind, but the strength

of Hope is in its eyes. A hope that cannot see what is, and can only see what is not, is a false hope. Hope, true hope, must take the measure of what is, and the full measure of what should be. This is the hope of Jesus Christ. He doth not heal the wounds of the daughter of Zion by whispers of Peace, Peace. The standard by which he measures men is nothing less than the perfect law of God. He saw the finished man as he came fresh from the hands of God, unstained by any sin, with perfect love and pure soul. That is the possibility of our nature which alone can satisfy Him. And more than that even, a greater than Adam, Himself is His ideal for humanity. He Who from the cradle to the grave was all untouched by sin; Who looking back upon His life could cry: "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do: I have glorified Thee." Yet with an ideal so lofty, so sublime, of Him it is written: *He shall not fail nor be discouraged.*

This is the hope of One *Who comes into contact with the worst side of the worst people.*

A policeman said to me one day, "It is a very easy thing for you to have faith in folks, sir: but it is very hard for me."

"Why so, my friend?" I asked.

"Well," said he, "you see the best of folks and you see them at their best: you see them because they are good. But I see folks because they are bad. And when you see nothing but badness it is hard to have any faith in any goodness anywhere."

I sympathised deeply with that man and with thousands who are in like evil case. *It is hard.* But this triumphant hope of Jesus Christ is the hope of One Whose life and work is in relation to sin. He comes seeking that which was lost, tracking it all along the way of its wanderings. He calls to Himself not the righteous but sinners. His contact is with outcast humanity—with lepers, leprous souls most scarred and more revolting than any other; with those who have gone down so low that they can find no pity anywhere but in His heart: no hope or refuge but in His presence: no help but at His hands.

And not thus only does He come into contact with sin. His goodness and the loftiness of His claims do array against Him the persistent and cruellest antagonism of the proud. The world's most pitiless scorn, the fiercest hatred, the most bitter persecution the world has ever seen have been gathered against our Lord Jesus Christ. Think of Him day after day, hour after hour, hearing the confession of penitent souls; enduring the defiance or indifference of earth's millions—yet He doth not fail nor is He discouraged.

Again, *He knows the force of adverse circumstances.* Often do our hearts fail us because of the evil surroundings which beset those for whom we would hope. Familiarised from earliest days with vice; never able to escape the griminess and misery of poverty—finding that honesty may spell starvation;

the hardest toil not always able to drive the wolf from the door. A life in which the only bit of brightness gleams from the gin-palace, and the only gaiety belongs to the thief and the harlot! And all this true not only of one here and another there, but that it should be the story of whole districts, from room to room, from attic to cellar, through street after street, until the heart is sick with sorrow and the brain is bewildered by the problem. It is hard to hope. But Jesus Christ Himself has felt the force of adverse circumstances. He Who was born in a shed and cradled in a manger; Who wandered hungry and homeless—doubted, despised of His very brethren. Against Him came all the troops of ill. The forces of adversity that meet us singly, against Him closed up their ranks and called out their reserves. Against Him the mighty Prince of Hell came foot to foot, and face to face, and put forth all his craft and skill. Probably about every other man that ever lived God set a hedge as He did about Job, but all naked and defenceless went Jesus Christ against His foe. He hath met all hindrances: He hath proved all difficulties: He hath triumphed over all the forces of evil. And lo! He stands victorious. Therefore let us believe and rejoice—He shall not fail nor be discouraged.

*The hope of Jesus Christ arises from His estimate of man's worth.*

How can we bridge over those gulfs of social differences which sever us from one another, and

which seem ever to grow deeper and wider? Alas, to-day it is in this world that Dives and Lazarus are hopelessly shut off from one another. To-day Lazarus cannot reach the rich man's gate—it is too far out in the suburbs; and as for the dogs, they are a great deal too delicately cared for to show the beggar any such delicate attention as that which is recorded concerning those of olden time. It is only in one way that deliverance can come—it is by making the man greater than position, greater than all his surroundings, that you can bridge these gulfs—thus and thus only. Do we not all remember the words, true, alas! to-day as when they were written?—

But why do I talk of death?  
That phantom of grisly bone:  
I hardly fear his terrible shape,  
It seems so like my own.  
It seems so like my own  
Because of the fasts I keep:  
*O God! that bread should be so dear  
And flesh and blood so cheap!*

Jesus Christ alone has made man worth more than gain or pleasure: and Jesus Christ alone can keep man so.) Where the influence of Jesus Christ is not felt man is a slave, and woman a toy or a drudge; and if the influence of Jesus Christ were withdrawn that would be the estimate again. The worth of humanity is the great revelation of the Bible. Count men worth little and you will do little for them: count men worthless and you will do nothing. Jesus Christ gave us the worth of the



man as in the one scale He put the round world and all that therein is, crowns, and thrones, and dominions ; gold, honours, possessions—and in the other scale the man. And lo ! the man outweighed them all. What shall it profit a *man*, a MAN, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul ?

It is hard to keep up the freshness and enthusiasm of hope for humanity when continually there is contact with foulness and coarseness ; with all that is offensive. These things disgust the sentimentalism of my Lady Bountiful. It is hard for hope to hold her own where there is the frequent relapsing, the terribly slow amendment. Here and here only is the source of its renewal—*Behold, behold, He shall not fail nor be discouraged.* The renewal of our hope is in beholding Him. The awful price which He has paid for every man and woman and child about us has made them sacred. He has consecrated humanity by His own incarnation, and by laying down His life for all. Now is there no limit to the claim which a redeemed world has upon us—would that we believed it.—*We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* If Christ so loved us, thus ought we also to love one another.

Again, *the hope of Jesus Christ is seen in His method.* “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench : He shall bring forth judgment unto truth.” Gentleness is the token of assured power.

Bluster is commonly the mask of weakness and fear. Coercion, compulsion, are the methods of a baffled or a bewildered authority. Patient hopefulness, gentleness, brotherliness—these are the Divine methods of uplifting men. They who do not know Jesus Christ may hate the people or fear them, but he who believes in Jesus Christ and God's way of salvation is bound to believe that the one supreme and infallible remedy for the world is in *pity, love, brotherliness*.

As Napoleon was conversing with his officers one day about the great men of antiquity, he turned to one of his suite and asked him: "Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?" The officer replied that he had not thought much of those things. "Well," said Napoleon, "I will tell you. I think I understand something of human nature, and I tell you that the heroes of antiquity were men, and I am a man. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself founded great empires; and upon what did the creations of our genius depend? *Upon force*. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to-day millions would die for Him."

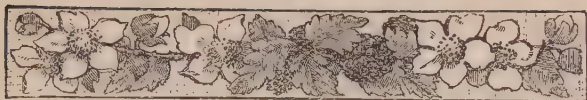
The hopefulness of Jesus is His imperishable confidence in love.

Lastly, *the hopefulness of Jesus Christ is rooted in righteousness*: "He shall set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for His law." There are those who have sought to remedy our social ills by pity without judgment, and without law. Their gifts

have pampered the transgressor and pauperised the poor. Of all the awful curses of this great London it is sad indeed to hear from those who know that none is more deadly in its mischief than indiscriminate charity. Yet others are there whose remedies are those of revolution—those of the fire-brand and the sword. Pull down the fabric of society that all may share in the plunder.

But the remedy of Jesus Christ is in a *new heart* and a *right spirit*. Not the circumstances but the character is to be created anew. Not in culture is His hope—that may be but veneer. “*I will put My law in their hearts.*” Make the *man* new, then shall *all things* become new.

So let us behold Him in the fulness of His Hope that our hope may be full. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged.*



## XXIV.

### THE GLADNESS OF JESUS.

“Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”—PSALM xlv. 7.

THE subject is one that ought to be sacredly dear to us. The joy of Jesus ought to be the source of our supremest joy. In that pathetic appeal which the Lord Jesus made to His disciples, when He was comforting them as one whom his mother comforteth, there was a word almost of reproof for their grief: “*If ye loved Me ye would rejoice because I said unto you, I go to My Father.*” This is the only Heaven which those who love Him can ever know,—the glory and gladness of our Saviour.

Think of some mother in a “Palace of Art,” where luxury has lavished its treasures, and wealth ministers to every want and summons skill to wait upon it; where all that can charm is gathered, and everything of beauty that earth can afford. But now the mother sits with the little fevered child in her arms making its moan and tossing the aching head to and fro. The beauty is gone then: it is

blotted out ; the wealth is a mockery ; the splendour is a burden of weariness. To see that little one bright and well : to hear again its prattle and its merry laughter,—all else were gladly given to buy that gift. The heaven of love is in the bliss of the beloved. It is but a coarse selfishness that can find its heaven in robes and pearls and gold and music. These things do heighten Heaven and complete it *only* when they are where St. John found them,—helping to utter and to swell the glory of the Lamb. This is our exceeding joy,—the gladness of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us to all shame, and anguish, and sorrow.

We *do* love Him : therefore in His joy we will rejoice and be glad. Yet it is not a matter of which we often think. The Man of Sorrows is much more familiar to us than the Saviour anointed with the oil of gladness. We have heard the cry,—“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow.” We have tarried at the Cross, and looked at that awful scene of shame and agony while our hearts have melted within us. But it is only a broken and one-sided sympathy that weeps with those that weep and cannot rejoice with those that do rejoice. Come then : let us gladly meditate upon this theme,—the gladness of Jesus.

*Think of the capacity of Jesus Christ for gladness.*  
The very saddest man that ever lived was our Lord Jesus Christ ; but that truth enfolds another,—the

very gladdest man that ever walked the earth was this same Jesus. This is not contradictory. The capacity for grief is the measure of the capacity for gladness. The depth is the height. He who never sinks never soars. The keen sensitiveness to sorrow is also and necessarily the keen sensitive-ness, in every healthy soul, to joy. He who sank as no other did to darkest depths of sorrow, rose as no other could to sunny heights of bliss. The tide that goes farthest out, leaving stretches of sand and shaggy rocks to be smitten by the fierce sun, is the tide that comes furthest in, sweeping with its force far up the coast, whilst it laughs and sings in its strength and fulness. The perfect human nature of our Lord, having every faculty developed perfectly, had this in its completeness,—*the faculty of gladness*. Think of Adam standing upon the earth, the God-made man, with everything within him so attuned that every breath and influence of earth broke into music as it touched him and went up to heaven in praise. So stands the Second Adam, the sinless Man Christ Jesus, His life a perfect harmony; a soul whose every string responded perfectly to the touch of God's finger.] That perfect harmony meant perfect rest and perfect blessedness.

*In the character of Jesus Christ there was nothing that marred or lessened in any wise His gladness.* We are rent and torn by a score of distractions. It is as if the strings of the soul were some of them broken, and some were all unstrung; and on the

others a dozen diverse players to contend for mastery. What a strife and horrid discord is life with many, perhaps with most ! To think of what Christ *was not* is in itself almost a dream of Heaven. In Him was no fierce ambition that scorns the present in its mad eagerness for that which was beyond,—blind and deaf to all but the cruel voices that call it further on and ever further. No soured discontent was there in Him which had got awry with all things. No bitter remorse did He ever know, that looked back and saw the rigid past where nothing was forgotten, nothing lost ; ever upbraiding for what might have been. No dark hatred lurked within that heart, hissing out its malice ; no fierce pride, swollen with its own importance, ever busy in asserting its greatness. “ *I am meek and lowly in heart,*”—therein doth lie well-nigh the half of Heaven. No covetousness possessed Him, that grips and grudges its gold, and grows ever hungrier by what it feeds upon and ever poorer by its possessions. No black and whispering fear pointed above or below, before or behind, and disturbed that perfect peace. He walked within a world where His Father’s love did compass Him ; where all things did wait and minister upon him ; a life in which the raven Care could find no moment’s doubt on which to light.

*Think, too, of the sources of gladness in Himself.* All the beatitudes were His and were His perfectly. It certainly is in itself an indication of His character that He should come into the world with all its sins



and sorrows ; and gathering His disciples unto Himself, the first word that He speaks is that word *Happy*, and the first thing that He does is to describe who are the happy. Remember, too, that to Him was given the Holy Spirit in fullest measure, and that in Him the fruits of the Spirit were perfectly developed ; and amongst these one of the foremost is joy. Go through the list and see how each is the minister of gladness. *Love ; joy ; peace ; long-suffering ; gentleness ; goodness ; faith ; meekness ; temperance*—the manifold elements of a perfect gladness. All that yields us sometimes the sip of a pure blessedness was His constantly and in its fulness,—benevolence ; unselfishness ; the devotion of life to highest ends ; enthusiastic toil for others. Think, too, of His purity,—how that His faculties were all undimmed and undulled ; life was ever to Him full of freshness and bloom. “ *Thou hast the dew of thy youth.*” The heat of fierce desire had not consumed it ; His soul carried ever the ready joyousness of a little child ; in Him was the freshness and purity of the dawn.

Then think of His gladness *arising from His relationship alike to Heaven and Earth*. “ The Child <sup>7</sup> grew and waxed strong in spirit ; filled with wisdom ; and the grace of God was upon Him.” And yet again says St. Luke, the Child “ increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” The perfect love of Heaven and earth meet in Jesus. The favour of God and man were His as none else

ever knew them. Count up all sources of gladness ; —there is none that can compare with the consciousness of God's favour. "Thy favour is better than life." When He saith, "Well done, good and faithful servant," we do enter into the joy of the Lord. As surely as the sunshine can chase away dull winter, and deck the earth with beauty, and cover once again the bare black trees with foliage, and fill the hedgerows with flowers, and give to the dull fields the rich promise of the harvest,—so surely can the gracious shining of God's favour fill the soul with deepest peace and richest joy. To walk hand in hand with Him is Paradise restored. Do we not all of us know what it is to feel the fever of our life rebuked ; and as the burden of care falls from the shoulders, we rest in such a blessed sense of God's love to us that we wonder whether doubt or fear can ever find a cranny through which again to creep ? Those moments, alas ! to the best of us so broken, were to Him the common and continuous experience of His life. The testimony that He pleased God was His always. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" was the benediction that perpetually descended and rested upon Him. The service of God,—alas ! so faulty and broken and stained at our hands,—He rendered perfectly ; so that He could stand and look back over a life full orb'd and rounded perfectly : "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do ; I have glorified Thee."

And He grew in *favour with man*. Never was any so gladdened with the love of earth as was our Blessed Lord and Master. Whilst it is true that the world hated Him, and the Pharisees and Scribes took counsel against Him: whilst there were those who resented His claims; who were indignant at the broader love that swept away their ancient privilege and went out in its fulness to all men: yet it is also true that the inner circle of His acquaintance yielded Him a devotion such as none else ever knew. If love is commanded and compelled by the love-worthy, who had such power to win the hearts of men as He? If we who have but the fragments of His history can say, "Whom not having seen, *we* love; and in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"—what of those who lived with Him: who day after day saw the beauty of His character, felt the hallowed influence of His Presence, had their souls kindled to a new devotion by the wisdom of His words, by His heroic endurance, by His calm fearlessness, by His perfect truth: who saw it all completed by a gentleness that won the hearts of little children, and a meekness that welcomed outcasts and lepers to His Presence? All that was good and noble was drawn forth to its fullest by His goodness; all that was sad and sinful found in Him a pity and a help that none else could ever bestow; all that was weak and afraid found in Him a refuge and strength. Men and women

and little children gladdened the heart of Jesus Christ as none else was ever gladdened, with their love and trust and gratitude. Take those three words,—*love* and *trust* and *gratitude*,—has earth any sweeter gifts,—has joy any truer elements ?

Love and trust and gratitude : these are the gifts which we can bring to Him ; and with which we too can make Him glad. The gifts that the poorest can bring, and outweighing all other gifts. The gifts in which the dull and ignorant can vie with the wise men. Love and trust and gratitude,—seeing it is all that we can give and all that He asks, let it be His, renewed each day : each day increased and intensified,—until all the life be but the utterance of the heart,—*Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee.*



## XXV.

### *THE GLADNESS OF JESUS.*

“Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”—PSALM xlv. 7.

WE have dwelt already upon some aspects of this subject ;—that the very capacity of Jesus Christ for grief was also His capacity for gladness ; that in Him was nothing that lessened His joy ; that the fruits of the Holy Spirit were His in their completest perfection ; and that He beyond all other that ever lived was gladdened by the love and favour of the Heavenly Father, and by the devotion and love of men and women.

Let us remind ourselves how difficult it is for us rightly to estimate the gladness of Jesus. We look back upon that life through the dark shadow of the Cross—the scenes which are most deeply graven upon our minds and hearts are of His suffering and shame. And our needs do make His suffering and death that to which our penitence and faith and hope most earnestly and eagerly turn. But our love to the Lord Jesus Christ should make us treasure very sacredly the proofs of that gladness which lights up His life.

*Think of the gladness of His youth.* He was no melancholy boy of whom we read that He grew in favour with men ; no mysterious dreamer whom none could understand, was He,—no mournful lad over whom there hung the mystery of a perpetual grief. We can only think of Him as a quick and generous spirit, gladly entering into the life about Him, ever self-forgetting, and ready to help and serve everybody. Never surely was there upon the earth a sunnier boyhood than that of the Holy Child of Nazareth.

There are many occasions on which it is simply impossible to imagine the Blessed Lord Jesus with any touch of grief either in His tone or manner. Remember that in His words He uttered *Himself*. He spake not opinions only of which no man knoweth the generation,—not light words only. In Him was a perfect consistency of heart and mind and word. This gave Him His authority : that which He was, He looked and spake. He wore no mask ; that guileless transparency of His nature baffled and bewildered His foes.

Take the story of the wedding in Cana of Galilee. *Jesus was bidden to the wedding.* It never occurred to any one, probably, to bid St. John the Baptist to a wedding. His dress and manner and whole life forbade it. But Jesus Christ was just the gracious Presence that was in keeping with the gladness of a wedding day. A mournful recluse would never have gone at all ; 'vanity of vanities, to such the

crowning vanity of all is a wedding. But the Blessed Lord Jesus brought with Him no gloom. If He had moved amongst them as one apart, if He had gone as we are apt to picture Him, downcast and sighing, certainly it would never have occurred to any to come to Him saying : " They have no wine." Every part of the story is the proof that He was amongst them as the simple, kindly, genial Brother of men contributing to their wants and completing their joy. He found His pleasure in fulfilling their pleasures. Is there not abundant evidence that it was not the words of the Lord Jesus only which offended the Pharisees, not even most of all ? It was the gladness and cheerfulness of His manner which stung these formalists. Their religion was in dress, in forms, in outward appearance, altogether mostly *in looks*. And the Lord Jesus plainly refers to them when He says : " Be ye not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance ; " they showed a heavenly-mindedness by their miserable countenances, and proclaimed their superiority to other people by *appearing to fast*. The simple gladness, the sunny brightness, the cheery hopefulness of the Lord Jesus Christ was an insult to these people. How often have we been told that it is written that Jesus *wept*, but it is never written that Jesus *smiled* ! Well, is there not a very good reason for that ? *The smile was perpetual*. Love ever filled that heart ; and think you that if that love so overflowed in words and deeds it could fail to light up His countenance with brightness ? Surely



it shone from those eyes; it smiled in gladness a thousand times a day. I am very fond of that little philosopher of whom I have heard—she ought to have written a commentary—a little five-year-old who sat one day amidst the grave old divines, when one of them said, “We read that Jesus wept, we never read that Jesus smiled.” “I am sure He did,” cried the little maiden. “How do you know?” said one reprovingly. “I am sure He did,” she persisted. And then explained half scornfully:—“Why, if He had said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not,’ and had not smiled when He said it, I shouldn’t have gone to Him!” No—nor anybody else. Assuredly upon those lips

“Perpetually did reign  
The summer calm of golden charity.”

The thousand beauties of the world, the scenes of gladness, the humour of earth, moved Him as they move all simple loving natures—only that in Him was a soul that lay more open than in any other; the faculties were undimmed and unimpaired, and all the healthy impulses of His holy nature were trusted without reserve and without suspicion.

Take the ninth chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel—*They bring to Him one that was sick of the palsy.* Do you not feel sure that Jesus smiled at the quaintness of that whole proceeding? Here whilst He is speaking in the crowded house, there is a knocking at the rafters—a falling of dust upon the sacred persons

of the Pharisees, then a streaming in of light—and as all faces are upturned an intruding bundle comes through the hole, and there is heard from without the clamour of men: “Manasseh, be careful! Gently, Benjamin! Now slowly! All together, lads!” and then the palsied is lowered at the feet of Jesus. Why, one could not help either smiling at the boldness of the men, or being indignant at the interruption. The Pharisees contributed the indignation—we can catch the smile of Jesus in the very words: the tone seems to come down to us. There bewildered and frightened at the audacity of his friends, the sick man gazes troubled at the presence of the Prophet. “Son, be of good cheer—thy sins are forgiven thee.” It was a word that lost its meaning unless it were right cheerily spoken. And the Pharisees and Scribes said, “*This man blasphemeth;*” but the direct offence was that everything was so unconventional; so shockingly simple and natural, and therefore so highly improper. Ah, how these Pharisees swarm to-day! Depend upon it, it was the look, the tone, the bearing, the manner, of Jesus that was His great offence.

Read on to the tenth verse: “*And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners sat down with Him and His disciples.*” St. Matthew very modestly conceals the character of his own entertainment; and it is left for St. Luke to tell us how that he made a great feast in his own house, and that a great company was gathered to

meet Jesus. And when the Pharisees saw it they said unto His disciples : "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" Can you think of the Blessed Lord sitting at that scene with a mournful countenance ; casting a gloom upon the festivity by His sorrowful spirit ? Do you think His love spread a grief and condemnation ? No, indeed—it was the simple gladness, the homeliness, the gracious freedom which made the whole scene what it was, and which so offended these Pharisees with their traditions of mournfulness. The answer of the Lord Jesus is a defence of the gladness, as against their religion of gloom. *"They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye, and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice. I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Then in the fourteenth verse we read that there came the disciples of John the Baptist. They cannot understand a religion which has in it so much of gladness as this which Jesus Christ both permits and shares. "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft," they ask, "but Thy disciples fast not?" So then the answer is softened, and His explanation is given : "Can the children of the Bridechamber fast so long as the Bridegroom is with them ? The days come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them : then shall they fast." His Presence is the gladness of the people : must be and cannot be otherwise.

Take another instance :—that recorded by St.

Luke in the tenth chapter and the twenty-first verse. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." The word means literally that He "*danced for joy.*" It was the manifestation of a gladness which filled and overflowed the whole being. And in that glad consciousness of power to help a world He stood and cried: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is an instance of a joy which could not either be restrained or uttered. And the source of it may well suggest the thought that it was not a single or exceptional event in His life.



## XXVI.

### *THE GLADNESS OF JESUS.*

“Thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”—PSALM xlv. 7.

WE have already dwelt upon the gladness of Jesus in Himself; and have traced a few indications of that gladness in the life of Jesus Christ, that fall like golden sunshine on some pine forest, thrusting themselves through the gloom and lighting it up with beauty.

*To-day let us think of the gladness of Jesus in His work.* The text itself suggests that scene in little Nazareth, when Jesus had gone into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read. He opened the book and found the place where it was written: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. . . . And He began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.*”

Some aspects of the gladness of Jesus will come before us if we think of *the purpose of the work: His fitness for it: and His joy in doing it.* Anything that is worth doing is worth doing well, and everything that is *well* done is a gladness. A thing of duty, as well as a thing of beauty, is a joy for ever. He is no true and healthy worker who does not find in his work a joy, an inspiration, a triumph. The Old Testament gives us an indication of this joyful service. "Lo, I come, in the volume of the Book it is written concerning Me, *I delight to do Thy will, O God.*" Upon Him ever was a compulsion to which He had surrendered His whole being: "*I must work the works of Him that sent Me.*" Yet was it no hard necessity—no bounden duty only. "*My meat and My drink is to do the will of My Father.*" But if all good and true work be an inspiration and joy, think of Jesus Christ standing upon the threshold of life and looking upon such a work as His.

*Here was one whose whole mission was for the poor and needy. The pure joy of great beneficence was His.* Listen to it all. The poor, the captives, the blind, the bruised—these are they to whom His whole life has reference. Kings had come for conquest and renown: mighty men had come to attain to wealth and greatness: philosophers had gathered the learned around them. But here was One whose whole work was for the sorrowful and the suffering and the needy. He stooped to them and

where the world gave them scorn He henceforth ordained for them pity and help. Only Jesus Christ has ever taught men the dignity of sorrow; the reverence due to grief: that pity is the right of the sad. How men thought of these is evident enough from the story of the blind man. It was sad that he was poor: it was sad that he was blind—to be either was bad: to be both was very bad; but that this very misfortune of blindness should be his reproach was a horrible addition to his sorrow. “Lord, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ~~Believe me,~~ The world has but one unpardonable sin—*it is to be unfortunate*. But lo! Jesus Christ comes and He gathers about Him not wealth, not luxury, not learning, not stately splendour:—but the world’s sad and sorrowing ones. “The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel *to the poor*.” That is where Jesus Christ began. He hid the seed in the common clay of our humanity—buried it there knowing it would rise, and uplift men; and that if we would get to a top the best way is to begin at the bottom. At times we have heard a cry: “Come, let us sow our seed corn on the tree tops; far above the coarse clods of the earth, and nearer heaven; in the stately branches of the forest kings”—but it has not come to much. This was the joy and glory of Jesus Christ. He preached the Gospel to the poor; and this is ever the condition of our success. Religion was to be no more a stately ceremony only for the



Pharisees and the cultured and wealthy people. No more a philosophy only for the learned to discuss, but a real Gospel for real needs, and for common people everywhere. Not a round of ceremonies, but a key to unlock prison doors, a power to open blind eyes, and to heal bruised and broken hearts.

The passage which Jesus Christ took as the text at His ordination sermon in Nazareth plainly has reference to the year of Jubilee, which was a season of boundless rejoicing. It was ushered in with the ringing notes of the trumpet throughout the land. The whole provision of the year was for the poor and needy. The sound of that trumpet was the most beneficent thing earth had ever listened to. The slave who had waxen poor and fallen into decay and had sold himself into bondage, heard that sweet ringing note, and he stretched himself a free man—free—free for ever. The poor captive heard it in his dungeon, and his fetter was broken and the prison door was opened, and he too was free. He who had got into debt and had given the creditor his land and house, heard the ringing music of that trumpet, and all was his own again, house and land. Forth went the creditor with all his belongings and once again father and mother and little ones were at home. Jesus Christ felt and knew that His coming was the Jubilee note of the world. He too was ushered in with music, and the angels sang a Jubilee hymn: "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will toward men." He was the blast of music that should ring

throughout the world a death-knell of tyranny and wrong and oppression; the restoration to all of liberty, gladness, possession. Even to us to help men here and there in our clumsy and doubtful fashion, amidst many failures to achieve some one success; to set the roses on some pale cheek; to bring a smile upon some sorrowful face; to place some fallen one upon his feet—this is to taste earth's purest, sweetest, truest joy. But to usher the Jubilee of the world; to stand and sound the note that meant for all men everywhere release from bondage; and the beginning of a new and blessed life—that was indeed to be anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows.

Again—*these words show us His joy in His conscious fitness for His work.* “*The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed Me.*” In Him was the power that waited upon His will and they wrought together perfectly. [How often have we sighed, “If will and power would work together a single hour!” To have the heart to do a great good and the power is the fulfilling of our joy. This was the gladness of Jesus. Again, there was no misgiving as to the essential blessedness. There is a bewildering, a paralysing doubt that creeps over us at times; one with which the most earnest and most self-denying are most familiar—that our good is not all good nor only good;—that charity, sweet charity hath very much to answer for; that of all the ills of London an indiscriminate charity is one of the greatest; that we

may degrade men by our help, and may pauperise men by our gifts. But here was no misgiving—He ever wrought a certain and assured good. Real, solid, abiding was the joy that filled Him in His work. Again, we doubt as to our method, we experiment and slowly find more excellent ways. Good will and power may yet work ill—we are not wise ; but in Him perfect wisdom wrought with perfect power, and the joy of service was full.

Think again, that this perfect fitness for His work meant a great joy in it. [What a man can do well he can do easily, says Ruskin ; and what he can do well, he does gladly.] See the ease of the Saviour's teaching—*He sat and taught—He opened His mouth and taught them.* There is no straining after effect ; no struggling to attain to some ideal. He Himself is the Truth. He does but open His mouth, and the gracious words flow forth. His perception of the truth is all rounded and complete. He sees not one side of the truth only, but He possesses it ; and all things wait upon Him and fit in with the truth. That perfect harmony within Himself found its completion in its perfect harmony with all nature. For Him the birds and the flowers, the operations of nature, the work of men, and the thousand influences in the earth illuminated and illustrated the truth.

Again, look at the ease of His miracles. There is no effort ; no struggle—He speaks and it is done. We see Him asleep in the storm, terror on every

face except where He lies calm and placid amidst howling winds and tumbling seas. Then comes the great wave that swamps the boat and the cry of the disciples—"Master, awake!" And rising He stands and speaks the one word—"Hush!" It is enough—there is a great calm. Again, we see the disciples gathered amidst the crowd vainly commanding the devils to come out of the man. Defied, and mocked, by the fiend; laughed at by the crowd; upbraided by the father; in vain they storm and rage at the foul spirit—they cannot cast him out. What quiet consciousness of authority is His! *Bring him unto Me.* What majesty of power is here! "*I charge thee come out of him and enter no more into him.*" And he departed out of him, and the child was cured that same hour."

The joy that Jesus found in His work is set forth by Himself—in the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. Then drew near to Him the great crowd of publicans and sinners for to hear Him. The host of "common people," as they are called; as if we were not all made of the same common earthen ware. The Pharisees murmured—"This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Note the reply of the Saviour. It was not based upon the need of those to whom He spake. It was not as we should have expected—an opportunity of declaring the oneness of humanity everywhere. His defence is *the joy of saving the lost.*

The parables in which He states His defence are

an exposition of the words—*This my joy*. The woman who has lost her piece of silver, and after searching diligently finds it, expects her neighbours and friends to share her joy. Even amongst the angels of God there is joy over one sinner that repenteth. The shepherd who leaves his ninety-and-nine, and goes away over moorland and forest to look for his lost sheep, when he findeth it bringeth it home with rejoicing. When the son in the far country arises and comes home doth not his father run and fall on his neck and kiss him; and they begin to be merry?

All this set forth the gladness of the Saviour of the lost. And over the whole life of the Lord Jesus Christ was the glow of the glory that would be. The sunny distance of the joy that was set before Him lit up the life. He saw the Cross, but He saw beyond it too. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow because her hour is come: but she remembereth no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world." The joy of a world redeemed; of death abolished: of hell despoiled of its prey; of Heaven opened to all believers; of the boundless dominion and endless blessedness of His sway—all this, indeed, was a joy unspeakable and full of glory—and this was and is "the joy of the Lord."



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